# MEMORIES OF MARTYRDOM AND LANDSCAPES OF TERROR:

# FEAR AND RESISTANCE AMONG THE MALAYS OF SOUTHERN THAILAND

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**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE**

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# FEAR AND RESISTANCE AMONG THE MALAYS OF SOUTHERN THAILAND

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# STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

This thesis represents my own work and research and I have duly acknowledged the sources and information which I have consulted for this project. The total word count for this thesis is 30,645.

Muhammad Arafat Bin Mohamad

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*"My friends are my estate." – Emily Dickinson*

*"No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks." – Anonymous*

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# SUMMARY

The re-emergence of an insurgency in January 2004 has generated much attention to the largely Malay-populated provinces of Southern Thailand. Since then, there has been a proliferation of published written works on the issue in the form of newspaper articles, reports, as well as scholarly writings. Yet, the issue remains largely perplexing for observers of the political violence including academic, public intellectuals, and the Thai-government, amongst others.

This thesis attempts to shed some light on the political turmoil through the author's observation of the everyday lives of Malays living in the area. It contends that Malay memories of violence between their community and the Thai-state are consequential in the formation of its contemporary members' attitudes towards the Thai-state and its agents such as the civil service and the security forces.

The Malay community of southern Thailand, however, must not be viewed as a monolithic group. While some amongst them take up arms and join the insurgency, many other do not. They resist the Thai-state is other ways.

Chapter one discusses the fear that grips the social atmosphere in Thailand's southernmost provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. It argues that fear is used as an instrument of power for the Thai-state as well as the

insurgents; both of whom aims to govern the political actions of the Malay residents of these three provinces. Yet, many Malays exercise agency by refusing to take sides with neither the Thai-state nor the insurgents. Instead, they adopt a 'third position' that commits to the use of peaceful means to resolve the conflict.

Chapter two is about Malay resistance to the Thai-states authority in the production of history of the Thai nation-state as well as its Malay population in southern Thailand. More specifically, this chapter discusses the creative agency of some Malays who build graves in the form of monuments in order to memorialize their interpretations of certain violent events in the history of their community's relations with the Thai-state.

The varying conceptions of the histories of the Malays and their historical relations with the Thai nation are discussed in chapter three. More specifically, it will be shown that the conflicting traditional Malay and Thai nationalist discourses impacts on the way that other members of the Thai society view the Malays and vice-versa.

# INTRODUCTION:

# ESSENTIALISM AND THE MALAYS OF SOUTHERN THAILAND

"What do you think? Can they find the solutions to this problem? I don't think so. They can't just come here for a few days each time and expect to find solutions. You, on the other hand, come here and stay in the village for months. You help the villagers with their work at sea; you do construction work with them; sit at the coffee-shop and talk to them. That's the way it should be. But can you find the solution?"

That was Khruu Jan's[1] response to me after I asked for his opinion on the prospects for the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC)[2] finding solutions to the on-going violence that has wrecked the socio-political landscape of Thailand's southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. I was gratified by Khruu Jan's appreciation for my approach to research, but I responded to his final question with a "no".

[1] *Khruu* means "teacher" in Thai. Khruu Jan is a teacher in a primary school in Pattani. Although he original hails from another province in southern Thailand, Trang, he now calls Pattani his hometown; he has spent more than thirty years in Pattani as he was posted to the school immediately upon completing his training as a teacher.

[2] The National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) was set up in March 2005 under the initiative of Thailand's Premier Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006). The commission was tasked with exploring possible solutions to southern Thailand's social turmoil through consultation with the Malay community of southern Thailand. The commission was disbanded after submitting its report in June 2006.

> Khruu Jan then added, "Many researchers come here and tell us that they want to do research. But, they are all the same. They stay for a week and then go back to Bangkok. Then, they come back six months later and repeat this. After that, they claim to have done research here for six months." My foster brother[3], Bang Ae, who was listening to our conversation nodded in agreement.

Khruu Jan's statement about researchers is perhaps too sweeping. Researchers are not a monolithic category of people. There are those who continue to conduct residential field research in the midst of daily violence in the provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, in southern Thailand. The current wave of violence in the area began when an army camp in Narathiwat was raided by a group of unknown assailants. The raiders killed four soldiers before making off with more than one hundred assault rifles; meanwhile, seventeen schools and three police posts were burnt down simultaneously. (Bangkok Post 2004c) According to Bang Ae, in a telephone conversation the next day on 5 January 2004, some people blamed the attacks on bandits, while others predicted a return of armed separatist movements, which had begun to dissipate following the government's granting of amnesty to

[3] *Abang angkat* in Malay. I found out that my maternal ancestor originate from southern Thailand when I went through my late-grandfather's journals in 2002; after visiting the area several times. On a subsequent visit, I whispered to myself saying that it would be pleasant to meet some of my own relatives in southern Thailand. Bang Ae and Bang Mat, another Malay man in his early forties, who had overheard my comment then offered to adopt me as a foster younger brother, *adik angkat*. The three of us have remained close since; they have since attended important events of my life such as my undergraduate graduation as well as my wedding ceremony.

insurgents in 1981. (McCargo 2007b) “Just when we thought that it (the separatist movements) was over and we can finally move on”, said Bang Ae who was anticipating the tough times that would follow the resumption of the insurgency.

Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat are the three southernmost provinces of Thailand that border with Malaysia. The majority who live here are Malay-Muslims, a large number of whom identify with the historical Malay kingdom of Patani[4] . The kingdom of Patani flourished in the area from early sixteenth century until 1786 when it was finally invaded by Siam, then ruled by Rama I, after several failed attempts by the latter. (Syukri 2005) Armed separatist activities in the area intensified in the 1970s when earlier peaceful demands for independence were not met. (A. Malek 1993) The authorities, however, appeared to have successfully established peace with the Malay population when there was a significant reduction in incidence of armed attacks on public officers in the 1990s.

The then Defense Minister, General Thamarak Issarangura, sent the nation into frenzy when he claimed during a cabinet meeting that the insurgents aimed to take control of Narathiwat in 1000 days and would hoist their flag at Thaksin Rajanivej Palace to mark their success. (The Nation 2004) This did not happen, but the violent attacks such as drive-by shootings, bombings, and arsons, escalated and would soon become a daily event.

[4] In this thesis, Pattani (spelt with 2 ‘t’s) shall refer to the province in present-day Thailand; Patani (spelt with a single ‘t’) shall then refer to the historical Malay kingdom.

Two violent clashes between Thailand's security forces and members of the Malay community have generated much interest in the on-going political conflict in southern Thailand; the first incident took place on 28 April 2004 while the second one on 25 October 2004. On 28 April 2004, militants attacked eleven security posts and checkpoints around provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Songkhla simultaneously. (Satha-Anand 2007) By the end of that day, more than one hundred of the militants, who were mostly armed with machetes and a few rifles, were killed in clashes that ensued between them and the Thai security forces at various locations. (Bangkok Post 2004b) This event attracted much attention and the government was criticized for the military's extreme use of force; 32 militants who had taken refuge at the Pattani's Krisek Mosque were allegedly shot at point-blank. (Bangkok Post 2004a)

The second incident took place on 25 October 2004. It began with more than one thousand Malay-Muslim protestors gathering outside a police station in the district of Tak Bai, Narathiwat. The crowd demanded the release of six village defense volunteers who were withheld on suspicion that they gave their weapons, which were issued by the government, to separatist militants. More than eighty of the demonstrators subsequently died as a result of the security personnel's violent handling of the crowd; rifles were fired in the direction of the crowd, demonstrators who were caught by the security officers were stamped upon, and then they were stacked into army trucks and transported to various military camps in southern Thailand. Video

CDs of the events quickly circulated around Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Video clips of the incident were also broadcasted on some international television channels. The death of more than seventy-five of those arrested due to suffocation while being transported to the military camps provoked much chastisement for the Thai government from various quarters including scholars, the media, and human rights organizations. (Tunyasiri 2004)

Three and a half years have passed since the start of the on-going wave of violence in southern Thailand in January 2004. Several major changes have taken place in Thailand's political arena such as the toppling of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra by a military coup in September 2006. The military has since appointed a civilian-led government headed by a retired general, Surayud Chulanont. Yet life has remained the same for many residents of southern Thailand. In a recent telephone conversation with Bang Ae, I asked him if the situation has improved. He responded by saying, "The situation remains the same; in fact, it may have gotten worse. I am not sure."

Khruu Jan's earlier statement about researchers, although simplistic, is important nonetheless. During a visit to southern Thailand in June 2004, some Malays lamented about being overlooked by public figures such as academics, government officials, journalists, and public intellectuals, amongst others, in public discussions about the on-going violence. "As usual, nobody sees us. Nobody hears us. This is always the case in Thai society. The 'small people' are always neglected", said Bang Ae.

There is some truth in Bang Ae's statement.[5] Most writings on the political conflict in southern Thailand that have been published since 2004 tend to adopt a macro-perspective on the issues involved. (Gilquin 2005; McCargo 2007a; Yusuf and Schmidt 2006) The violence in southern Thailand is often seen as a problem that needs to be diagnosed so that a quick solution to the violence can be developed. Furthermore, the situation is often assessed from a scholarly perspective; very little attention is paid onto how the violence is being interpreted by individual members of the community in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat.

Most works on the Malays of southern Thailand (A. Malek 1993; A. Malek 1994; Al-Fatani 1994; Fraser Jr. 1984; Gilquin 2005; Suwannathat-Pian 1988; Syukri 2005; Teeuw and Wyatt 1970; Yusuf and Schmidt 2006) tend to essentialize them as a monolithic group; that is opposed to the Buddhist Thai nation-state. This is partly due to the macro-perspective approach undertaken when studying the community. Consequently, these writings about the relations between the Malay community and the Thai nation-state tend to classify their viewpoints in a binary-logic; their opinions tend to be represented as being in opposition to each other. For example, Sugunnasil

[5] Actually there are writers who do pay attention to the "small people". See,

Janchitfah, Supara

2007 A Tale of Towns in Fear. Bangkok Post, 29 July 2007.

C. Pinyorat, Rungrawee

2007b Thai Muslims Often the Victims in Fight between Muslim Radicals and Buddhist Rulers. Associated Press, 11 June 2007.

(2007: 113) states that Malay-Muslims in southern Thailand reject "the secular orientation of the Thai state, which is seen as incompatible with the region's devoutly Muslim ways." This is, then, argued to be one of the main factors that contribute to a growth in Islamic radicalism amongst them. Sugunnasil's argument carries weight; however, he fails to show that Malay views on the Thai-state are varied. Some Malay-Muslims feel that the state allows adequate space for them to practice their religion.[6]

In this thesis, I hope to show the varied attitudes and responses of the Malays[7] of southern Thailand to issues of violence that have plagued their community primarily since 2004. Indeed, many Malays are influenced by the dominant discourse in their community; that the Thai-state has treated them cruelly. However, there are some amongst them who are more skeptical. They question these dominant perspectives, which usually originate amongst their community's elites. Hence, it is argued that there is room for agency amongst members of the Malay community of southern Thailand despite the unequal power relations that they are subjected to.

It is argued in this thesis that the resistance of the Malays in southern Thailand against the Thai nation-state takes on a multiplicity of forms. While some take part in armed anti-state resistance movements, others take the

[6] This point will be elaborated in chapter three.

[7] My fieldwork was primarily conducted amongst the Malays. With the exception of a few ethnic-Thai friends with whom I played *sepaktakraw* regularly, it was generally difficult to conduct research amongst members of both the Malay and Thai communities. The on-going conflict has unfortunately created much tenseness between both communities. Thus, it would be difficult to earn the trust of one community if one is seen to be spending much time amongst the other.

Thai nation-state to task on other issues such as the production of the community's history.

In the first chapter, I argue that the socio-political landscape of the three provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat is devastated by the on-going violence. Many people in southern Thailand experience fear in their daily lives; in a large part, due to the constant threat of harm to their lives. This fear is both the result of, and the thrust for, the surveillance activities of the insurgents as well as the Thai-state. Although the threat of violence from the insurgents and the Thai-state through its security force seems to be omnipresent, many Malays exercise political agency by refusing to take sides with either side in the conflict.

Chapter two is ethnography of violence and remembering. It is about the attempt of some Malays to memorialize their interpretations of violent episodes in their community's relations with the Thai nation-state in recent years. More specifically, some Malays build graves in the form of monuments to buttress their community's remembering of some of its members who were killed by various agents of the Thai-state such as its security forces. While these men would be viewed as trouble-makers by the Thai-state, these tombs commemorate them as heroes amongst the Malays. Yet the doubts of Bang Mat, a Malay, for the validity of the martyrdom that has been conferred on them by some members of the Malay community, including religious institutions, shows that some Malays question the credibility of the perspectives of not only the Thai-state, but also that of the Malay builders of

these tombs in regards to the slain individuals. Bang Mat's views shows that not all Malays are easily consumed by the politics between their community and the rest of the Thai nation-state such that they uncritically acquiesce to the dominant political viewpoints of their community.

Chapter three shows that varying conceptions of Thailand's past influence politics in the nation-state's contemporary society; it takes the discussion of memories of violence in chapter two into the context of national politics. For people who are solely exposed to, or are convinced by, Thailand's nationalist history, the Malays of southern Thailand are easily viewed as perpetual dissidents who are disloyal to the institutions that many other Thai citizens treat with sacrality such as the nation-state, the monarchy, and Buddhism. Traditional Malay interpretations of their community's past, however, claim that the Malays were subjugated by Siam[8] in 1786. Dominant Malay social memories of their relations with the Thai-state after their defeat in 1786 are permeated by memories of the historical injustices of the Thai-state. Such memories, especially those of the sufferings of fellow Malays, create fertile grounds for Malay armed resistance movements to recruit members from within their ethnic community. However, many Malays do not support the insurgency; let alone join it.

The history of humanity has been tarnished with too many instances of violence including wars, genocide, human massacres, and terrorism,

[8] Thailand was formerly known as Siam. The name change took place in 1939.

amongst others. Many of these regrettable events such as the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia as well as the massacre of the Jews by Germany in the Second World War are caused, in part, by the essentialist attitudes of some influential individuals or institutions in societies. Such attitudes when reinforced by an uncritical support of a substantial following are a potent brew for violence to transpire.

The violence in southern Thailand can be explained, in part, by the existence of essentialist views of the Thai nation-state towards its Malay population in southern Thailand; the reverse is also true. This thesis adopts a more nuanced view of the Malays of southern Thailand by paying attention to the dominant, as well as alternative, views of the Thai nation-state amongst members of the Malay community. Likewise, some non-Malay members of Thai society do not subscribe uncritically to the view of the Malays as disloyal troublemakers. A discussion of the alternative views of these non-Malay members of Thai society is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis.

I do not claim to understand the violence in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat more than others. However, I hope that this thesis shows the importance of recognizing the presence of agency amongst the Malays of southern Thailand; in order to combat the essentialist images others have about them; especially those of their fellow countrymen. Similarly, it is important to combat essentialism worldwide; such enterprise may just help humanity avoid the costly lessons, such as the unnecessary sacrifice of

human lives in events such as wars and genocide, from which many amongst us have failed to learn.

# CHAPTER ONE

# VIOLENCE, FEAR, UNCERTAINTIES, AND POLITICS: SOUTHERN THAILAND IN A CLIMATE OF FEAR

The weather was hot, as usual, that morning. I sat alone at a table in Mat Soh's coffee-shop, sipped my coffee and watched Kampong Keli's residents shop at the travelling market that came to the village every Wednesday. Chicken rice, sweet drinks, fruits, snacks, dishwashing detergents, brooms, and used clothes were some items that were on sale.

A man stepped into the coffee-shop and heaved out a lungful of air. He called out an order for a glass of iced tea as he walked to join me at the table. I noticed him looking intently at my mobile phone as I held it up to read a text message that I had just received. Then, he asked me, "You are not from here?" I was taken aback. According to him Siemens-brand mobile phones are not popular amongst mobile phone users in southern Thailand. I took that as a cue to divulge my identity. The man looked skeptical even after I introduced myself as a Singaporean graduate student. What is a Singaporean dressed in sarong and t-shirt doing in a village in the violence-plagued region of southern Thailand? Mat Soh interrupted our conversation to re-affirm my identity; that I was the leader of the two groups of students who came and build extensions to the village's *tadikah*[9] in 2002 and 2003.[10] The man

[9] *Tadikah* is a type of Islamic religious school that is usually run by members of respective villages. The schedule of operations varies from one *tadikah* to another. Most Muslims in the Thai provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat are introduced to the basic teachings of Islam at these schools.

introduced himself as Mat Ding. He told me that he had heard of our community-building projects.[11]

I told Mat Ding that my stay this time was going to be a little different from the others. I was conducting field research and would be living in southern Thailand for six months. I explained to him that I was interested in studying the ways in which the Malay residents of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat coped with the daily violence that was devastating the social environment in these three provinces.

Mat Ding's face lit up as he began to show enthusiasm about my research. Many government officers, scholars, and journalists discuss the on-going violence in public. Yet, Mat Ding thinks that many of them are oblivious to the everyday predicament of residents of the three provinces; when interest is shown, it usually concerns the perceived need to empower Buddhists communities with firearms to defend themselves against suspected Malay-Muslim militants. Mat Ding's views are shared by many Malays, as I would find out during the course of my fieldwork. [12]

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[10] I first visited southern Thailand in February 2002 to conduct preliminary assessments for the feasibility of locating a community service project involving undergraduates from the National University of Singapore. Subsequently, I returned to southern Thailand during every university term break for research, leisure, as well as community service.

[11] The travelling market used to be located at another site in the village. However, it has been relocated to the *tadikah*. The temporary stalls are now set-up on the concrete courtyard that was built during the second community service project.

[12] Since I started researching rural issues since 2002, I am often told of the indifference attitude with which the quotidian concerns of rural communities are treated. Even non-governmental organizations, who claim to champion the rights and interests of the under-

For Mat Ding, traveling along roads, especially the highways, had become considerably risky. His pickup truck's tires have been punctured by metal spikes that were placed on the highways twice when he drove to deliver goods at night. These metal spikes are meant to puncture the tires of military vehicles as they travel to sites of insurgent attacks during the night. Mat Ding had, since, reduced the number of delivery jobs that he undertook and restricted all his commuting activities to the day. He said that he had to make those decisions even if they were detrimental to his family's income. He would consider stopping all delivery jobs as well as peddling at the traveling market if the situation worsened. Mat Ding excused himself half an hour into our conversation in order to pack the goods back onto his pickup truck as the market was closing for the day.

The on-going violence in southern Thailand, which broke out in January 2004, has attracted considerable attention from various quarters; local and foreign governments, media, scholars, and terrorism studies institutes, amongst others. The violence is often viewed by many as a problem akin to an illness for which a panacea needs to be prescribed swiftly. The importance of seeking solutions to the violent cannot be denied. However, this enterprise must not be limited to the search for anti-state insurgents to find out the motivations behind their campaign and negotiate for an immediate cessation of their violent activities. Instead, attempts must

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privileged, are sometimes accused of pursuing their own vested political and economic interests.

be made to comprehend the socio-political conditions of the community from which such anti-state Malay attitudes emerged. Doing so may not provide us with concrete solutions to the conflict; however, it enables us to locate the on-going violence within the context of relations between the Thai-state and the Malays of southern Thailand, which has been marred by conflicts that span several centuries.

This chapter centers on the everyday lives and concerns of the Malay residents of the three provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat in its violence-wrecked socio-political landscape. It suggests that many people in southern Thailand are living in a climate of fear.

It will be argued that fear is instrumental in the political strategies employed by the perpetrators of violence. On the one hand, the Thai-state and the alleged insurgents, which are the more visible parties in the conflict, attempt to sway the Malay-Muslim population into supporting them by discrediting each other's actions. On the other hand, both parties effect fear amongst the residents of southern Thailand through a combination of violent acts as well as the issuance of threats in order to deter present non-partisans in the violence from joining the enemy. This will explain, in part, for the reactions and 'non-reaction' of the Malays to the violence as well as to the Thai-state's policies to solve it.

Finally, this chapter argues that many Malays in southern Thailand resist the efforts of either party to dominate and govern their actions. This

chapter will, thus, provide a backdrop for the discussion of the Malays' interpretations of the history of their community's political relations with the Thai nation-state that disputes Thailand's nation-building narrative. The preservation of such historical views by the Malays is partially subversive and is therefore will be taken as a form of non-violent resistance to a domineering Thai-state.

## Change in Atmosphere for Research in southern Thailand

My conversation with Mat Ding at the coffee-shop confirmed several thoughts that I had in regards to the initial three weeks of my fieldwork. I spent most of that time helping my friends with crab-trapping at sea in the mornings and talking to them at the coffee-shop for the rest of the day. Basically, I was waiting; waiting to meet new people, waiting to hear the latest news of violent incidents, and waiting to visit other villages among others. The on-going violence had profound impacts on the social activities of the residents of southern Thailand, and has consequently made field research a knotty issue.

It took two weeks before my friend Bang Tah from Kampong Ketam managed to secure the deal for me to rent a house in his village. Actually my foster brothers, Bang Ae and Ban Mat, had decided that they would persuade me into living with one of their families during the course of my fieldwork.

They felt that that would be the safer option as opposed to me living alone. I, on the other hand, felt uneasy at imposing on their families' privacy.[13]

Similarly, it was my relentless persuasion that drove Bang Tah to agree into introducing me to a trainer at a *muay thai* training camp that was located in the same sub-district[14] as Kampong Ketam. I had first learnt *muay thai* from an eighty three year-old man from Kampong Keli in 2003 and had subsequently continued training with a martial arts school in Singapore. I felt, then, that joining a training camp in southern Thailand would enable me to meet new people who would also be potential informants for my research while I continue practicing the sport.

Bang Ae and Bang Mat who were normally proactive in helping me out with my research activities since 2002 displayed changes in attitude. Since 2004, I have been warned not to discuss the issue of the on-going violence with strangers. Therefore, I was to rely on my closest friends and foster family such as Bang Ae, Bang Mat, Bang Tah, and Ayah Leh, to introduce me to others with whom it was deemed safe to discuss my research topic. Bang Ae and Bang Mat, however, constantly postponed the interviews that they promised to arrange. I did not want to be pushy although I was beginning to feel frustrated and anxious at the possibility of a futile fieldwork.

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[13] Furthermore, their houses were normally full. Amongst the Malays of southern Thailand, it is common for several generations of family members to live under one roof.

[14] Tambon in the Thai-language.

The reluctance of Bang Tah, Bang Ae, and Bang Mat, to introduce me to others, however, began to make sense, especially after my chanced meeting with Mat Ding at the coffee-shop. The violence in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, has evoked much fear in residents of the region who, now, exercise more caution in their social activities. As was often said to me by others in southern Thailand, “You never know whom to trust.” For Mat Ding, even the brand name of my mobile phone was an indicator of my identity; that I was an outsider. Hence, it was reasonable that he would seek to ascertain my identity before talking to me. Fear has become central in the structuring of social activities in southern Thailand.

## Climate of Fear: Life in southern Thailand’s Violence-Wrecked Landscape

Fear is such as unexceptional emotion; everyone experiences fear. According to Robin (2004: 27), “Fear is supposed to lurk beyond the reach of our rational faculties, a pre-natural invader waiting to breach the borders of civilization. It has no history.” Fear is experienced as we go about with our daily activities.

Although fear may then be treated as part of the human condition, its intensity and impact can vary greatly. For people whose lives are surrounded by violence, like in southern Thailand, fear’s influence on people’s decision and behavior intensifies vis-à-vis other determinants of behavior. Mat Ding, for instance, is willing to stop his business operations if the threat of violence

heightens. Here, fear clearly poses a challenge to economic-pragmatism as Mat Ding deliberates his economic activities.

Sadly, fear may also cause people to act in ways that are inconsistent with their own moral values. The following story, which Bang Ae related to me, illustrates this point.

> "It happened on my return after visiting you in Singapore in December 2004. I had just arrived. I was in a *songthaew*[15], heading home towards Kampong Keli. We were still in *Amphoe Muang*[16]. The *songthaew* was moving slowly and then I heard someone shout for help. So, the driver stopped. I saw a woman pointing to a man who was unconscious after his motorcycle crashed into a gate along the side of road. As the driver and I helped him get off his motorcycle, I heard the woman wailing loudly. She said, '*Serdadu*[17] Bang Mat has been shot! *Serdadu* Bang Mat has been shot!' Only then did I realize that I was handling a murder victim in the on-going violence. After laying the dead policeman by the roadside, I turned to the driver, who is my friend from the neighboring village, and

[15] The *songthaew* is a form of public transportation. In southern Thailand, It is usually a pick-up truck that has a roof fitted into the rear portion. There are usually two or three benches placed for passengers to sit on.

[16] "*Amphoe"* means "district" and "*muang" means "*town" in the Thai-language. Therefore *"amphoe muang"* means "town-district".

[17] *Serdadu* means police or policeman. So, *Serdadu* Bang Mat means a policeman who name is Bang Mat.

told him to get into his vehicle and we drove off. Afraid …

(Bang Ae sighs and shakes his head) … Afraid."

Why did Bang Ae leave the site so hurriedly? "Afraid" was his answer when I posed him that question. Bang Ae feared that the killer may be observing the people at the scene and that if he was seen talking to the police when they arrive, the killer might think that Bang Ae was providing information to them. This, in turn, could result his own murder. As Bang Ae said, "I may be the next person lying on the road."

The violence and the resultant climate of fear have clearly altered people's behavior. Many people know Bang Ae as a very helpful and civic-minded person. Yet, he was 'forced' to leave the site of murder hurriedly for fear over his own safety. His decision is not considered unusual by others. Unfortunately, I was told by several others that they may not even stop to help if they come across an accident; especially, if they are unfamiliar with people in the area.

## *Sources of Fear*

I have not witnessed any violent incident in southern Thailand during my visits there since the start of the crisis in January 2004; not even during my six-month fieldwork. There were, however, killings that took place in Kampong Ketam, the village in which I rented a house. My experience is not unique. Most of the people, whom I talked to, in southern Thailand have never witnessed the occurrence of violent incidents.

Green (1994: 230) noted that, “Fear is an elusive concept; yet you know it when it has you in its grips.” It is a reaction to perceived danger; fear grabs you when you feel vulnerable. For many people in southern Thailand, their social environment is full of symbols of danger; burnt buildings, shootings, and bombings; soldiers on beat, soldier-manned roadblocks, and even the sight of a convoy of military trucks passing through the village. I recall vividly that the sound of a helicopter hovering over my house during the graveyard hours used to make me feel anxious.

What is happening? That seems to be a question that is planted in everyone’s head. For many Malay residents of southern Thailand, there are too many questions regarding the on-going violence that have not been convincingly answered. Who are the perpetrators? What are their motives? Who are they targeting?

So far, none of the explanations that have been offered are considered acceptable. The most common view seems to be that the violence is being carried out by Muslim militants in pursuit of independence from Thailand for the Malays of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Some Malays ask, “Why are they killing fellow Malays then? Why are there more Malays than non-Malays who have been killed?”

With so many questions left unanswered and the government still unable to get the situation under control, life in southern Thailand remains full of uncertainties. “Fear thrives on ambiguities.” (Green 1994: 227)

Rumors, anonymity of perpetrators, perceived random targeting of victims, and some dodgy policies of the government create and sustain people's fears.

## Rumors

One of the dilemmas that quickly confronted me when doing this research was related to the treatment of information. By the end of 2004, I have traveled many times to southern Thailand to conduct short periods of fieldwork. I was convinced that seeking the truth behind the causes of the violence was going to be an uphill task.

Feldman (Robben and Nordstrom 1995: 233) notes that rumor "renames the field site for the ethnographer." He posits that the ethnographer often encounters a situation where the "usual sources of facts, the channels and flows of information on which his or her work is dependent, are interrupted and broken up by political white noise."(Robben and Nordstrom 1995: 233) It is further argued that the floating of rumors in ethnographic fields of violence indicates a "crises of facticity". This was, in fact, the situation in southern Thailand. Simons (Robben and Nordstrom 1995: 42-61) notes that rumors are often the only source of information for ethnographers studying violent conflicts. While the veracity of rumors is difficult to ascertain, rumors may still be instrumental in our efforts to understand the socio-political milieu in southern Thailand.

Leaflets[18] that are distributed in public spaces are a prominent source of rumor. These leaflets, whose authors are usually anonymous[19], often contain messages that discredit the Thai state as well as threats to those who are deemed to be state-collaborators[20]. Many of them are instructional; leaflets instructing people to stop working on Fridays stirred up much reaction during the course of my fieldwork. These leaflets, which began to be distributed in July 2005, initially advised shop-owners to stop operations every Friday in order to respect the "Islamic holy day" (Harai and Benjakaj 2005).

I recall vividly the time when Bang Ae told me about the leaflets as we changed into our exercise attire before heading out to play *sepaktakraw*[21] with other villagers at Kampong Keli. Sounding extremely worried, Bang Ae said, "Don't know what's going to happen. Now they say that people who open their shops on Fridays will have their ears cut off." He let out a sigh,

[18] Referred to as *bai pliu* in the Thai-language.

[19] Sometimes the leaflets are signed-off by entities such as "fighters of Patani" (Para Pejuang Patani) or Mujahideen Patani. Aside from several individuals who have been arrested on the suspicion of being authors or distributors of these leaflets, entities such as Para Pejuang Patani and Mujahideen Patani do not point to any particular individual. Thus, I consider such entities to be anonymous.

[20] Muslims who cooperate with the Thai state are labeled as *munafiq*, betrayers of Islam and the Malays of southern Thailand.

[21] *Sepaktakraw* is a sport that is played with a rattan ball that is approximately 6 inches in diameter. It is played between two teams of three akin to volleyball although only the feet and head are used for striking the ball. This sport is popular throughout Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore. During fieldwork, I played *sepaktakraw* with the villagers of Kampong Keli regularly. Our conversations in between games were a great source of information for my research amongst other topics that were discussed.

shook his head, and continued, “They make it difficult for villagers such as market vendors. How are these people going to survive?”

I sat and chatted with some friends at a coffee-shop that night. As usual, they interpreted the issue in various ways. Some said that it was probably a good idea to stop working on Fridays; it would allow fishermen and rubber-tappers, who otherwise work every day, to spend some quality time with their families. Such is the reaction of some people who remain optimistic in terrifying and depressing times. Some of them, however, eventually admitted that such developments in the violence are economically detrimental to them.

The next day, 29 July 2005, Bang Ae and I rode our motorcycles to see if the Friday vendors at the district market would accede to the instructions specified in the leaflets. And so it was, we rode along empty streets; the fresh market was closed and the atmosphere was eerie. This situation continues to the present-day, although a few scattered shops in the three provinces have resumed operations on Friday. Even official statements made by the Yala Islamic Committee explaining that Islam does not forbid its faithful from working on Friday have not been able to reverse the situation. (Harai and Benjakaj 2005) Visits by the former Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, to build the confidence of the community on the issue have also failed. (Nanuam and Benjakaj 2005) Bang Ae’s reaction is telling when he said, “It’s easy for him to say. When he comes here, he is protected by so many

soldiers. After a day or two, he goes back to Bangkok. But we live here. Who will protect us?"

## The Puzzle over the Identities of Perpetrators of Violence

Like the authors and distributors of leaflets, many perpetrators of violence in southern Thailand remain anonymous. Very few amongst the suspects arrested since the outbreak of the violence in January 2004 have been charged and subsequently proven guilty. Meanwhile, violent incidents such as drive-by shootings and bomb explosions remain almost a daily occurrence. Security forces have little control over the situation. Soldiers and police officers are sometimes seen as sitting ducks despite donning bullet-proof vests and carrying firearms. According to some people, the uniforms and equipments of the security officers make them more conspicuous and thus easy targets.

The Malays of southern Thailand are often chastised other members of Thai society for not cooperating with the government and its security forces in efforts to identify and arrest the perpetrators. The identities of the perpetrators may indeed be known to residents of the particular areas where they come from. However, the decision by these residents not to reveal the identities of perpetrators is not ungrounded. On the other hand, it is also highly probable that many people in the region are unfamiliar with the identities of the perpetrators. According to Bang Ae, "It's alright when we are in our own village. We know one another. But when we go to another village,

we don't know. The locals will know their neighbors, but we don't. Thus, we don't know who carries out violent attacks outside of our own village."

Many villagers feel unsafe while traveling outside their villages. Several people told me that they feel anxious when other motorcycles, especially those with pillion, approach to overtake them. It is often perceived that drive-by assassins work in pairs; one person concentrates on riding the motorcycle while the other acts as a sniper. On many occasions, security officers who sit on the rear carriage of patrol pick-up trucks would stare at me as I overtake them; especially if I am riding with another person. Someone told me that he had a rifle quickly pointed at him by a soldier once when he reached into his pocket to answer a call on his mobile phone while his friend, the rider, was overtaking a patrol vehicle. He raised his arms to show me that the hair on his arms was standing as he still gets the creeps whenever he reflects on the experience.

My friends and I sat down at a coffee-shop beside Bang Ae's house as we waited for the prayer call at dusk from Kampong Keli's historic mosque one evening. We watched and listened intently as the daily report on the violence was read on the news. One of my friends, then, exclaimed that one of the victims was murdered by soldiers. I asked him to explain as I have heard such allegations been made by several others. He claimed that he contacted his friend who lives in the area after receiving a text message carrying the details of the geographical location of the incident through the mobile phone network operator news update service. According to his

friend, some villagers observed that soldiers have been loitering near the victim's house for several days; hence, they believe that the murder was the work of soldiers. So fast the way rumors spread.

Bang Mat concurred by saying that many people discerned a pattern in the sequence of events building-up to some violent incidents. According to some villagers, the sight of soldiers loitering close to one's house spells trouble. When some soldiers stationed themselves in front of my house in Kampong Ketam in the mornings in order to 'provide security coverage' to students and teachers of a nearby *pondok*[22], my neighbors insisted that it would be expedient for me to stay in Kampong Keli for a few days. I acceded to their advice. Nothing violent happened eventually. The soldiers stopped their operations after three days.

Some Malays reckon the possibility of government-linked agencies such as the police and the military involvement as perpetrators of the violence. Distrust for the state and its security apparatuses runs deep amongst many Malays of southern Thailand. There have been instances of villagers placing physical obstacles as well as human barricades to obstruct security personnel from entering their villages to conduct investigation of murders. One such incident took place at Ban Lahan following the murder of a Muslim cleric in September 2005. (Ruangdit 2005) A similar blockade was also staged at Ban Tanjong Limo, in the same province, following the

[22] *Pondok* is a type of full-time residential Islamic religious school.

butchering of two marines who were clobbered to death after being taken hostage by the villagers. (Pathan and Ganjanakhundee 2005) These human barricades bespeak of the villagers' distrust for the state and its security forces. (Pathan and Ganjanakhundee 2005) The two marines were originally meant to be used as a bargaining tool for the villagers to demand that the government investigate into a fatal shooting incident in the village that occurred earlier that week.

## Everyone is at Risk: the Need to Exercise Extra Caution

Che Su, Bang Ae's father-in-law, is a man of quiet disposition.[23] Interaction between us comprised mostly of polite smiles and occasional pithy conversations. In the morning before I moved into my rented home at Kampong Ketam, Che Su approached me and smiled before sitting on the wooden floor of his stilted house and watched me pack my belongings into my haversack. From the awkwardness of his body-language, I sensed that he had something to tell me. So, I started a conversation by commenting on the tediousness of packing. Che Su acknowledged my comment with the usual smile. Then, in a concern voice he asked if I was sure about my decision to move to Kampong Ketam. He said that I was always welcomed in his home. I told him that it would be better to my research if I talked to more people than just residents of Kampong Keli. Che Su acquiesced although my decision

[23] Che Su's face is tanned and wrinkled. It tells the story of a fisherman who has endured years of hardship working in the scorching sun. His life is a real success story to many residents of Kampong Keli. Two of his five children have earned their degrees. One of them went on to complete a Master degree, while the other is employed in the civil service a district officer. In southern Thailand, like in many rural provinces in Thailand, a career in the civil service is respectable and therefore highly sought after.

still bothered him. He, then, offered advice, “Try not to go out at night. Don’t sit by the roadside. (I’m) worried that they mistake you for someone else and shoot you.” I nodded in appreciation of his advice.

Che Su’s words illustrate the fear that many people have of becoming accidental casualties of the violence. Many people say that it is better to exercise extra care lest one risks being caught at the “wrong place” and at the “wrong time”. Some of them, however, would sigh and tell me, “(I) don’t know when I’ll die. If it’s fated, then I can’t avoid it”.

Fear escalates when it is perceived that targets of violence are selected randomly. (Turk 1982) Various people in southern Thailand told me that although violence and insurgency are not new to the area, it was safer in the past. Many people told me that insurgent movements used to target only government-related people and institutions. This has changed since January 2004. Human casualties include both government and non-government related persons and organizations including civilian bureaucrats, security officers, teachers, religious leaders, plantation workers, ordinary civilians, and businesses amongst others. People are being killed regardless of their ethnicity, religion, gender, and age. This situation is particularly traumatic for many people as it is quite commonly believed that anyone may be targeted.

## The Distressing Policies of the Thai-state

Some policies introduced by the state to manage the situation in southern Thailand exacerbate the climate of fear. The practice of compiling a top-secret blacklist was often mentioned in conversations. Generally, many

people were skeptical of the state's intelligence-gathering methods. Islamic religious teachers were notably worried. Islamic religious schools are often accused of being nests for the nurturing of insurgent elements. Bang Mat, who is the headmaster of Kampong Keli's *tadikah*, has been interviewed several times by the military as well as the district office on several occasions. A villager at Kampong Ketam once told me that he refused to allow his son, who is studying at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, to return to Thailand until the violence is over. Like many other parents whose children are enrolled in Middle Eastern universities, he is worried that his son may be arbitrarily placed on the blacklist.

The confidence that many people in southern Thailand have in the Thai-state is tenuous. The acquittals of suspected insurgents in court reduce their trust further. On 3 June 2005, four men, including a medical doctor named Waemahadi Wae-dao, were released on bail after being detained for two years during their trial. (The Nation 2005b) All four were eventually acquitted from the charge that they were members of the regional terrorist organization, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). (The Nation 2005a) Waemahadi Wae-dao said, "… State officials should use my case as a precedent and a lesson for arresting others. They should have sufficient evidence before prosecuting someone." (The Nation 2005b) In light of such fiascos, many people remain doubtful of the Thai-state's ability to manage the situation.

## *Political Fear and Discipline: Using Fear as a Vehicle of Power*

For many residents of southern Thailand, like the Xe'caj of Guatemala who community was caught in the midst of several decades of violence, "Fear is the reality in which people live, the hidden state of (individual and social) emergency that is factored into the choices women and men make." (Green 1994: 228) Fear "arouse a heightened state of experience" (Robin 2004: 4) through which people are sensitized, or perhaps over-sensitized, to perceive potential dangers that surround them. The situation, then, renders people more vulnerable to political manipulation; as "fear is an apprehension of harm, and because harm is the deprivation of some good to the individual, wielders of power can arouse fear merely by threatening the individual's enjoyment of that good" (Robin 2004: 19); a peaceful life in the case of the residents of southern Thailand. Thus, fear may be utilized as a potent vehicle of power for both political elites as well as retractors who stand to profit from it. (Robin 2004)

The use of fear as a vehicle for political domination is not a recent trend. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1995) begins with the public torture of Damiens in France in 1717 for alleged regicide. Damiens's public torture and subsequent execution is an example of the use of violence on a political dissenter with the purpose of punishing him for his crime as well as to deter other potential dissidents through effecting fear.

In southern Thailand today, the use of fear as a vehicle for power is commonplace. The conspicuous presence of security officers combined with mounting distrust for them and the Thai-state heightens many people's fear. Bang Ae, for instance, always try to avoid roadblocks with the reason that "it is troublesome". Eventually, Bang Ae divulged that his avoidance of roadblocks is motivated by his fear for uniformed officers. His fear is, however, not baseless. Many people in southern Thailand have seen the intensity of violence that security personnel are capable of; such as the security forces' response to attacks by Malay militants on 28 April 2004.

On that day, several groups of lightly-armed militants attacked several security checkpoints in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Of the events that led to a total of 113 fatalities, the clash between the militants and security force at the historic Krisek Mosque received the most interest.

Several militants attacked a security post that was adjacent to the Krisek Mosque in the early hours of the day. In retaliation, security officers surrounded the mosque after the group of lightly-armed militants, retreated into it to seek refuge. After a nine-hour stand-off, soldiers stormed the mosque. The ensuing carnage saw the employment of machine guns, grenades, and rockets by the military on thirty-two militants who were mostly armed with machetes, with the exception a few guns. All the militants were killed; some at point-blank.

More than one hundred militants were killed in similar clashes that occurred simultaneously between security forces and militants on 28 April 2004. Their corpses were lined-up by the roadside at the various sites of violence akin to a public display.

I received a telephone call from Bang Ae immediately after the events of Krisek ended. According to him many of his fellow villagers hurried to the beach when they heard gun-fires coming from the direction of Krisek. Tears rolled as they anticipated the terrifying news. Several individuals whom I met alleged that the massacres of the militants, especially at Krisek, were done purposefully by the government and the military. They contended that these events were meant to serve as examples for others. The corpses of the militant that were displayed embodied the threat to anyone harboring anti-state intentions. In fact, many Malays of southern Thailand argue that the militants involved in the Krisek incident would eventually be forced to surrender if the security personnel simply continued to cordon the mosque and employ non-fatal tactics.

The impact of the events brings to mind Foucault's (1995) discussion of public torture. The spectacle of public tortures or the use of violence to punish perceived enemies of the state is not directed solely at the alleged criminal. These events may, in fact, be seen as the state's warnings to its subjects. The fear that is evoked from the subjects may then be used to coerce them into compliance and even cooperating with the state; in other words, to "discipline" them. (Foucault 1995) Such results are, however, not

always achieved. If the punishment is deemed unjust by the subjects, the state's performance of power may backfire. (Foucault 1995) Many Malays count among those who are enraged by the state's disproportionate use of force; hence, intensifying the unfavorable relations between the Thai-state and its Malay subjects in the southern region and contributing to their reluctance to cooperate with the Thai-state's campaign to solve the violence.

## *"Panopticism" of the Thai-State and the Insurgents*

"Can they guarantee our safety? What will happen to our families if we are killed? The police and soldiers can't even protect themselves! They are also scared!" said Bang Tah in response to my question. I had earlier asked Bang Tah for the reasons behind the reluctance of many Malays to volunteer violence-related information to the authorities.

Many people in southern Thailand maintain a low-profile to avoid being seen as having any political-inclination; neither supporting the causes of the insurgents nor the Thai-state. They believe that it may be dangerous, even fatal, to be seen as a supporter or collaborator of either party in the conflict.

While conducting fieldwork in 2005, I observed that the on-going violence was hardly, if ever, discussed openly in public. At the various coffee-shops in Kampong Keli, the men[24] would only discuss the issue in their small

[24] Coffee-shops are frequented only by men. Women normally gather in their friends' homes. My wife, who has visited Kampong Keli several times, felt intimidated by the overwhelming male presence when she patronized a coffee-shop once together with Bang Ae, Bang Mat, and me.

groups of trusted friends. Then, Bang Mat and Bang Ae would remind me regularly to speak softly when talking about the violence. The situation has worsened since then. According to Bang Ae, "Now it's better not to say anything in public. For example, when news of the death of *khruu* Juling[25] was broadcasted on television, someone at the coffee-shop expressed pity for her. Someone else then asked forcefully, 'Have you lived long enough?'" said Bang Ae during a visit to Singapore in 2007. Thus, similar to Tambiah's (1996) observation of the violence in Sri Lanka, the violence in southern Thailand has become routinized and developed its own semiotic logic. The threats, leaflets, killings, bombings, and obvious presence of uniformed officers have taught the residents of southern Thailand to remain 'docile'. The message is clear; do not cooperate with the other side lest risk being harmed.

"You never know who is watching", continued Bang Ae. Insurgents as well as the Thai-state have successfully used violence as well as threats of violence to create a "panoptic" environment. The use of civilians for surveillance has engendered a perception amongst many residents that the insurgents as well as the Thai-state are omnipresent.

"We can't even trust our own neighbors. The government offers rewards for anyone who provides credible information. But, what is

[25]*Khruu* Juling Pongkunmul died on 8 January 2007. Juling had been in a state for coma for eight months after an angry mob of villagers in Narathiwat clubbed her in a school hostage drama. The development of this case was highly publicized. Her funeral rites were royally-sponsored.

'credible'? How do we know that they won't twist the facts because they need a scapegoat?" – Bang Tah

Thus, the use of civilians to conduct surveillance has theoretically surpassed the efficiency of Bentham's Panopticon. (Foucault 1995) In the Panopticon, a vertical surveillance relationship is established between the inmates and the jailor. In southern Thailand, a horizontal surveillance relationship involving civilians is used to enhance vertical surveillance activities by both the insurgents as well as the Thai-state.

## The Non-Passivity of the Non-Partisans

Despite the daily occurrence of violence in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, the physical landscape does little to evince that the area is indeed marred by protracted violence. Aside from several vandalized signboards and burnt buildings that are sporadically located, the ubiquitous presence of uniformed security personnel is perhaps the most visible hint of the violence.

If many people are indeed living in a state of fear, why do the physical and social landscapes appear normal? Perhaps for many people, the violence manifests only in the form of news that is broadcasted daily on television. Bang Ae was quick to respond when I suggested this to him. He warned me not to let the calmness mislead me. He added' "I cannot speak for everyone, but many people choose not to think too much about it (the violence). We

need to defend our way of life, our livelihood. How do you cope with the violence? Aren't you afraid?"

Bang Ae's question surprised me initially, but I could relate well to it. People often asked me if I was afraid in doing research in southern Thailand. I often responded by saying that I try not to think too much about the violence lest I will not be able to conduct my research. Perhaps I was foolish. Or perhaps one requires a different logic in order to cope with violence. "Although we feel wedged between the insurgents and the government, we cannot let them take full control over our lives", said Bang Ae.

Bang Ae's words were enlightening. They cast the non-insurgent residents of southern Thailand in a different light; although they are non-partisans in the violence, they are not politically passive. Indeed, they exercise agency in their political lives. Sometimes their positions are clearly discernable. The thrashing of Thaksin's incumbent Thai Rak Thai party during the general elections of February 2005 is an example. A record voter-turnout in the three provinces and the failure of Thaksin's party to capture even a single seat allocated to Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat in the House of Representatives evinces the residents' dislike for Thaksin and his party. The refusal of the majority of the residents of these three provinces to vote for the election candidates from Thaksin's *Thai Rak Thai* party is an expression of the their disdain for Thaksin's management, or mismanagement, of the violence in southern Thailand.

At other times, the positions of the residents in regards to the insurgent-state conflict are less explicit. Many people's views of the insurgents as well as the Thai-state are volatile. Events such as the clashes between Thailand's security force and militants on 28 April 2004 as well as the security force's violent handling of demonstrators at Tak Bai on 25 October 2004 affect many people's views rather significantly. During these events, the security force, and therefore the Thai-state, was thought to have employed disproportionate force on the militants and the demonstrators; thus, appearing cruel in the minds of many residents of southern Thailand. Consequently, "Some people began to think that perhaps it would indeed be better if we gain independence", said Bang Ae. However, it is important for us not to rush into concluding that the Malays of southern Thailand harbor anti-Thai nationalistic intentions. According to Bang Ae, such reactions emerge in the "anger of the moment." He claims that the attitude of the Malays towards the insurgents and the Thai-state changes in response to the actions of either side in the events that unfold in the on-going violence.

Events such as those of 28 April and 25 October 2004 are not the only source of influence on people's views of the conflict. The quotidian experiences in people's lives, especially since the start of the violence, make the process of identifying with either conflicting side more complex. The collapse of the economy in the Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat is often blamed on the insurgents. Many people told me that the on-going violence has discouraged outsiders for doing business with them. Many residents of

Kampong Keli who are producers of fish crackers claim that many businessmen are afraid of dispatching their pick-up trucks to collect the fish crackers. Hence, with no means to transport their produce, the village economy is in a dire state. During a visit to Singapore in 2007, Bang Ae told me, “Many people say that they are angry towards the insurgents. What they are doing is hurting us badly.”

Although wavering in their attitudes towards the Thai-state and the insurgents, many residents of southern Thailand seem fixed on maintaining a ‘third position’ in the conflict; neither giving full support to the state nor the insurgents. Many of them who are committed to this position hope for a quick halt to the violence. The cessation to all the violence, in turn, should be achieved through peaceful means. People often told me that they are most saddened by the lost of many lives; alleged insurgents, state-linked persons such as security officers and civil servants, especially teachers, and most importantly innocent by-standers in the conflict. Nevertheless, it is possible for one’s attitude towards either side in the conflict to change, especially when one’s family members have become victims of the violence. During fieldwork, I followed Ayah Leh, who considers himself a “peace-advocate”, on his visits to several communities. He often spoke of the need to remain firm in their commitment to the use of peace-building approaches to end the violence. During a visit to southern Thailand in May 2007, it appears to me that many people remain committed to the third position. However, many residents of Kampong Keli seem enervated by the protracted violence that

has impacted their lives in significantly negative ways. There was a lot of disappointment and hopelessness in Bang Mat's voice when he asked me, "How do you think this conflict can be put to an end? The scholar community keep saying *santhi*[26] this, *santhi* that, but what do all these terms mean for our lives? We are still no nearer towards finding an end to the conflict then we were in 2004. In fact, we may be farther away now."

## Conclusion: The Incessant Resistance of the Malays

Since the re-emergence of widespread violence in southern Thailand in 2004, the social environment in the region has degenerated into one that can be characterized as a climate of fear. This chapter has argued that the insurgents and the Thai-state combine the use of violence and threats as a mode of conducting politics; especially for the government of people's actions. Fear is materialized through practices such as surveillance, bombings, as well as news reports and everyday gossip. Surveillance, when conducted with the cooperation of civilians, intensifies people's fears and, in turn, creates a panoptic social environment.

Many residents of the three provinces that are engulfed by the violence, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, resist the Thai-state and the insurgents by not completely complying with the demands of either side. Their non-action in this respect evinces that many, if not most, people of southern Thailand are not politically passive. They exercise political agency

[26] *santhi* is usually used as part of words that indicates peace; for example, *santhiphaap* (peace) and *santhiwithii* (peaceful means).

through their resilient commitment to the pursuit of peaceful approaches to end the violence. It has been shown that Malay resistance to the Thai-state is not limited to armed nationalist movements as in the case of the insurgents. Much can be learnt about the longstanding conflict between the Thai-state and the Malays of southern Thailand if we are not fixated on the spectacle of the violent armed resistance.

# CHAPTER TWO

# HEROES, REBELS, OR VICTIMS: "TOMBS OF MARTYRS" AND MALAY MEMORIES OF VIOLENCE

The weather was hot and the sky was clear and blue; rather unusual in the month of December in southern Thailand. With the northeast monsoon hitting the eastern coast, rainfall and even storms would be more commonplace in this part of Thailand during this time of year.

Bang Tah, myself, and several other friends were sitting in the rear-portion of a pick-up truck; the sun's heat stinging our skins. We were making way to the Provincial Islamic Committee of Pattani's complex where a discussion organized by "Midnight University"[27] involving some residents of southern Thailand and non-governmental activists from various provinces across the country. I was particularly attracted by the possibility of meeting Nidhi Aeusrivongse, a noted Thai historian, who was scheduled to be at the event.

Bang Tah and I talked casually, engaged in banters, and shared complains about the hot and humid weather. It's funny how people always complain about the weather even after they have experienced the same climate for almost all of their lives. Suddenly Bang Tah's facial expression

[27] Midnight University is an Internet-based forum [http://www.midnightuniv.org/] where social and political issues about Thai society are discussed. It regularly attracts academics and public intellectuals who contribute think-pieces that encourage critical analysis of social issues amongst the website's visitors.

changed and he began speaking in a serious tone. He asked if I had ever visited *Kubo Tok Ayah*[28]. When I told him that I had not, Bang Tah pointed out that we had just gone past that cemetery. He then advised me to visit *Kubo Tok Ayah* where I will be able to see physical attestations of what he called, "Siamese cruelty" [29]. His suggestion was timely as I wanted to identify objects, buildings, or symbols that possess historical significance to Malays of that region during that trip.

Nine out of the thirty-two Muslim fatal casualties of the armed clash at Krisek Mosque on 28 April 2004 are buried at *Kubo Tok Ayah*. Their identities are not clear, except for one whose family had earlier intended to bury him in another cemetery in the town-district of Pattani, but changed their decision at the persuasion of the Provincial Islamic Committee of Pattani. I heard rumors that only two of the bodies were, in fact, unidentifiable; as for the others, their families were too afraid to claim their bodies as the then Prime Minister Thaksin had ordered that the families of the 106 Muslim casualties be investigated.

An argument ensued when the military tried to spray water in order to wash the unclaimed bodies. The Provincial Islamic Committee of Pattani asserted that the victims were *shuhada*, or Islamic martyrs, as they had launched a *jihad*. Col Yodchai Yangyuen, commander of the Pattani army

[28] *Kubo* is the Malay word for cemetery. *Tok Ayah* is a term of reference for a person whom the Malay community views with esteem. *Tok Ayah* as it is used in the name of this cemetery, however, refers to a particular person whose grave is located in that cemetery.

[29] The exact phrase used by some Malays is "*Kezolimae Oghe Siye*"

jurisdiction, initially refused to accede to the request of the Provincial Islamic Committee of Pattani, but eventually backed down after an hour of negotiations. (Nanuam 2004)

Due to time constraints, I did not visit *Kubo Tok Ayah* during that visit in December 2004. Instead I returned in February 2005 eager to undertake a study of "tombs of martyrs"[30] that can be found in southern Thailand.

This chapter discusses the tombs of martyrs of the Malay community of southern Thailand. These tombs are built as monuments by some members of the Malay community in order to promote a remembrance of the individuals who lay buried in them as heroes; heroes of the Malay community who were cruelly killed by agents of the Thai-state. Due to the message that these tombs communicate, which is detrimental to the interests of the Thai nation-state, these tombs remain publicly inconspicuous. However, the personal recounting of events that are associated with these tombs show that these tombs are quite effective in achieving this aim, as many Malays, although not everyone, subscribe to their narratives. The previous chapter established that many Malays resist complete domination over their lives by insurgents as well as the Thai-state by refusing to side with either party in the on-going conflict. This chapter's discussion shows how

[30] *Makam Shuhada* as it is referred to in the Malay-language. This is the term that is commonly used by many Malays in southern Thailand to refer to the type of graves that are discussed in this chapter.

some Malays are able to resist the over-bearing Thai nation-state by building monumental cemeteries that oppose official notions of certain past events.

## Kubo Tok Ayah: A Platform for the Production of Malay Memories of Violence

Upon entering the grounds of *Kubo Tok Ayah*, one is immediately greeted with a sea of gravestones. Several concrete-gated sections located on the left-hand side of the main footpath are an exception. I immediately guessed that the graves found within these gated sections belong to that of the former Malay aristocratic families, as was the practice in various cemeteries around southern Thailand.[31] Furthermore, *Kubo Tok Ayah* is located approximately two hundred meters from a palace that was built by a Siam-appointed ruler of the province in the mid-nineteenth century.[32]

As I walked towards the gated compounds, another grave on the right-hand side of the footpath caught my attention. Nonetheless, I followed the lead of Ayah Leh, Bang Ae, and Bang Mat, who were all walking towards the entrance of the gated sections. After saying some prayers dedicated to the former rulers, I asked Ayah Leh about the grave that had earlier caught

[31] For explanations pertaining to physical structures and cultural practices associated with Muslim graves in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat see:

Bougas, Wayne A.

1988 Islamic Cemeteries in Patani. Kuala Lumpur: The Malaysian Historical Society.

[32] Siam's army successfully invaded the historical Malay kingdom of Patani in 1786. After a series of two uprisings led by Malay-rulers who were appointed to the throne by Siam, it decided to divide Patani into seven provinces. The palace at Cabang Tiga was built by the ruler of Patani, which was by then just one of the seven provinces.

my attention. Why was it constructed differently from other graves that are found outside the gated sections? Ayah Leh's face lit-up as he smiled and told me that that was the grave that he really intended to show me during that visit.

## *Makam Shuhada Trajedi Pada Hari 13 Tanwakhom 2518: Tombs of the Martyrs of the Tragedy of 13 December 1975*

**Picture of *Makam Shuhada 75***

**Close-up of Matching Set of Four Grave Markers at *Makam Shuhada 75***

First and foremost, the "*Makam Shuhada Trajedi Pada Hari 13 Tanwakhom 2518*[33]" or "Tomb of Martyrs of the Tragedy of 13 December 1975" (hereafter *Makam Shuhada* 75) stands out from other graves in the compound of *Kubo Tok Ayah* because of its physical attributes. Like other Muslim cemeteries in southern Thailand, almost all the graves of non-aristocrats are marked by only two gravestones: one marks the position of the head and the other the foot; the two gravestones, and therefore the bodies, are aligned in the direction of the Kaaba. *Makam Shuhada 75*, unlike other graves, is raised. This design characteristic, which is usually reserved for aristocrats, is an indication of the social importance of the buried persons. Other physical attributes of this tomb makes this point even clearer. Four pairs of red-painted tombstones are neatly arranged on top of the raised platform. A gate is also erected around the tomb using short pillars that are connected by chains. Even from afar, the contrasting red and green paints used on the tomb easily attract the attention of the visitor's eyes.

Some information is painted on one of the walls of the tomb. The information is provided in two languages; Thai as well as Malay, which is written in the Arabic-Jawi script[34]. The information given on the signboard

[33] 2518 on the Thai-Buddhist calendar is equivalent to 1975 on the Gregorian calendar.

[34] The Arabic-Jawi script was the de facto writing script of the Malay-language prior to the use of the Roman alphabet. Malays of southern Thailand continue to write, almost solely, in the Jawi script whereas most other practitioners of the Malay-language have switched to the Roman alphabet after it was selected to be the official script by the Third Malay Language Congress in 1956. See:

Hussain, Abdullah, Nik Safiah Karim, and ASAS 50

state that eleven persons died during an unfortunate event that occurred on 13 December 1975. The names of those who died are listed in both languages.

**Information in Thai-language**

In the Thai-language the name list starts with a heading that reads “Name List of Fallen Warriors during 13 December 2518 at 1940 Hours”. The final sentence in Thai-language states that the tomb was built in January 1976. The information provided serves several purposes: firstly, it informs visitors of the identities of persons who are buried in the tomb; secondly, it may spark interest amongst visitors who are ignorant of events of December 1975 to seek more information; thirdly, the information is meant to advocate a certain way of remembering the events of December 1975 as a tragedy, especially by those who are already conscious of them.

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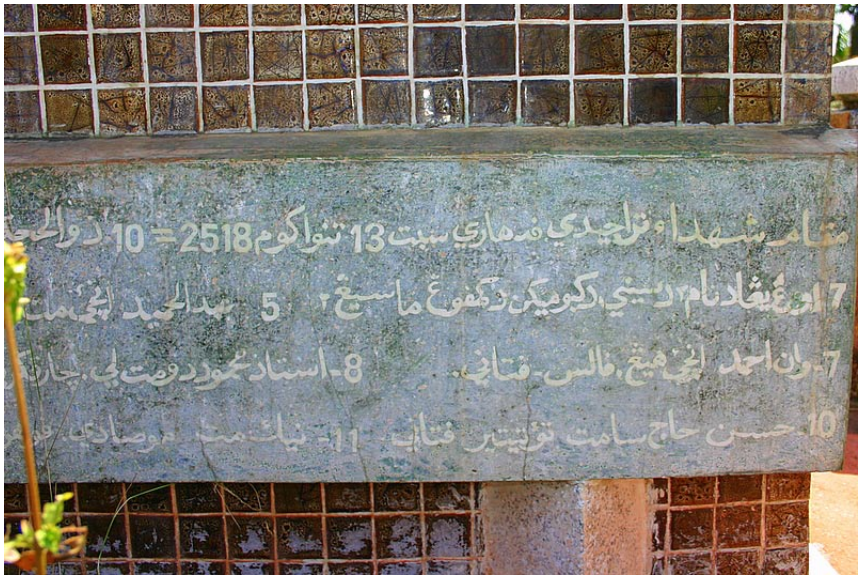
1987 Memoranda Angkatan Sasterawan 50. Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti.



**Information in Malay-language**

The information written in the Malay-language serves the same purposes identified above. The heading identifies the tomb as "*Makam Shuhada Trajedi Pada Hari 13 Tanwakhom 2518*". In the Malay-language, "*makam*" is usually applied only to prominent persons such as prophets, saints, and sultans or rajas. By identifying the grave as a "*makam"*, its planners and constructors have elevated the buried-persons to a high social standing. Similarly, by labeling the persons whose names are listed at the tomb as "*wirachon*" and "*shuhada"* (both terms may be loosely translated as "warrior"), it is hoped that the persons will be remembered in a positive light. The Arabic-derived term "*shuhada"*, however, carries a religious connotation as it is more accurately translated as "religious martyr".

The visit to *Kubo Tok Ayah* roused my interest in the event that is commemorated by *Makam Shuhada 75*. The tomb was clearly constructed as a monument; an embodiment of a narrative of a past event. What happened

in December 1975? Why is the event categorized as a "tragedy"? Why are the persons whose names are listed on the tomb labeled as *shuhada*; fallen heroes of the Islamic religion?

## The Tragedy of December 1975 in Malay Writings

The eleven[35] persons, whose names are listed at *Makam Shuhada 75*, died from injuries caused by grenade explosions on 13 December 1975. (A. Malek 1993; Al-Fatani 1994) The three grenades, which were allegedly thrown out of the compounds of Provincial Administrative Center of Pattani, caused approximately fifty other persons to sustain serious injuries. These casualties were participants of a massive demonstration against the Thai-state over an alleged extra-judicial killing of five Malay residents of southern Thailand. (A. Malek 1993; Al-Fatani 1994)

On 29 November 1975, six young Malay men were stopped by naval personnel while they were returning to their village, *Kampong Hutan Berangan*, in Saiburi-district of Pattani province. (A. Malek 1993; Al-Fatani 1994) A. Malek (1993) claims further that the six young men had earlier been forcefully taken to a nearby temple and were instructed to worship a Buddha statue. When they refused to comply with the naval personnel's orders, they were battered and stabbed. The six men, who were all thought to be dead, were subsequently disposed of at the nearby Saiburi River. (A. Malek 1993; Al-Fatani 1994) However, one of the six victims was still alive when several

[35] The exact number of the event's fatal casualty is unclear as it has varied according to different accounts of the incident. However, I have decided to follow the number of casualties that is listed on the tomb.

villagers found them; the sole survivor, who was fifteen years-old at that time, told others of his near-death experience.

Stories about the alleged assault of the six Malay men by naval personnel circulated rapidly. When the authorities failed to identify and arrest the perpetrators of the murders, several Muslim students in Bangkok organized themselves and formed the “Southern Group” with the support of the radical National Students Council of Thailand (NSCT). (A. Malek 1993; Al-Fatani 1994) The Southern Group, then, organized a demonstration in front of the Provincial Administrative Center of Pattani on 11 December 1975; under the banner of the, then newly formed, “People’s Defense Centre”. Approximately 1,000 demonstrators took part in this event. (A. Malek 1993; Al-Fatani 1994)

The following demands were made: The authorities should identify the perpetrators of the murders and punish them accordingly; the government should pay a 5 million baht compensation to families of the victims of the alleged murders by naval personnel; the government should admit that the perpetrators were in fact officers of the state and withdraw naval personnel from the 3 provinces within a week; the Prime Minister, Kukrij Pramoj, should come to Pattani to accept the petition personally and provide necessary explanations to the crowd after which the Thai government should review its policies towards the largely Muslim-populated provinces of southern Thailand. (A. Malek 1993; Al-Fatani 1994)

Meanwhile, the crowd of demonstrators in front of the provincial administrative center continued to grow; the headcount was estimated at 23,000 by the second day. (A. Malek 1993; Al-Fatani 1994) The third day, which coincided with Eid ul-Adha, attracted even more demonstrators. (A. Malek 1993; Al-Fatani 1994) By then, the size of the crowd was overwhelming as huge amounts of Muslims came from all the three Muslim-dominated provinces of southern Thailand to partake in the mass Eid-ul Adha prayer. Protest leaders took turns to deliver speeches to the crowd that day.

Then, an unfortunate incident occurred; three grenades were hurled out of the compounds of the provincial administrative center into the demonstrating crowd, which until then had been protesting peacefully. (A. Malek 1993; Al-Fatani 1994) The explosions resulted in chaos; the panic intensified when electricity was cut-off by the police sending the surrounding environment into darkness. According to A. Malek (1993), an Islamic religious teacher, Ustaz Mahmud Abdul Latif, took to the stage amidst the chaos and recited the azan in order to calm the hysteria; he was shot at and subsequently died on the stage. The grenade explosions as well as random firing of firearms by the police took the lives of eleven demonstrators while approximately fifty others suffered serious injuries. (A. Malek 1993; Al-Fatani 1994)

Security was intensified after that incident. The demonstrators reorganized and shifted the protest site to the Pattani Central Mosque. (A. Malek 1993; Al-Fatani 1994) The anger and disappointment of the

demonstrators escalated when four of the fatal victims were being buried as martyrs at *Kubo Tok Ayah*. (Al-Fatani 1994) I was told by some Malays that *Kubo Tok Ayah* was chosen, in part, due to its proximity to the palace as well as the "*Masjid Raja"* or Sultan Mosque at Cabang Tiga.

A series of negotiations took place between the "People's Defense Centre" and government representatives. (A. Malek 1993; Al-Fatani 1994) Lieutenant General Sant Chitpattima, Security Commander in-charge of the Muslim-dominated provinces of southern Thailand, demanded that the Provincial Islamic Committee of Pattani retract its proclamation of martyrdom on the dead demonstrators. (A. Malek 1993)

Another unfortunate incident took place on 19 January 1976 when a Sub-lieutenant Wanhawak, a policeman who is claimed to be drunk at that time, charged towards the demonstrators with his motorcycle; he was caught and beaten to death by them. (A. Malek 1993) Security personnel retaliated by charging at the crowd with four tanks while retrieving the slain officer's body.

The demonstrators persisted with their mission under the watchful eyes of Thailand's security force until 24 January 1976; forty-five days since it began. (Al-Fatani 1994) Prime Minister Kukrij Pramoj visited Pattani after representatives of the government and the demonstrators came to a compromise. The details of the agreement are: the government promised to arrest the perpetrators of the murder at Saiburi; the government would

compensate the families of the all the Malay victims of events unfolded since 29 November 1975; all naval personnel would be withdrawn from the provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat; the government would punish the perpetrators of the grenade attack on the demonstrators in accordance to Thailand's laws. (A. Malek 1993)

In an address to Muslims of southern Thailand, Kukrij asserted that all Thai citizens are equal before the state regardless of their individual religious faith. (A. Malek 1993) However, Kukrij was less conciliatory while briefing security personnel stationed in southern Thailand; he encouraged them to defend Thai heritage, nation, and monarchy. He added that security threat posed by the "war" in southern Thailand was more critical than any conflict that was taking place in other regions of the country; including the activities of the communists in border areas of Thailand and Cambodia. (A. Malek 1993)

Al-Fatani (1994) claims that the promises made by the government in exchange for a cessation of the demonstration at Pattani Central Mosque in January 1976 were never fulfilled; in fact, he alleges that many of the leaders of the demonstration would one by one go missing.

A. Malek (1993) opines that the events of December 1975 was instrumental in publicizing the Thai-state's maltreatment of their Malay citizens. He optimistically claims that officers of the Thai-state could not afford to treat the Malays arbitrarily anymore; especially since the Malays

had become unified in their opposition to the Thai-state. I contend that A. Malek was perhaps too optimistic as the preceding chapter's discussion has shown that many Malays continue to claim that they are still maltreated by officers of the Thai-state.

The accounts of the "Tragedy of 13 December 1975" by A. Malek (1993) and Al-Fatani (1994) befits the categorization accorded by the Provincial Islamic Council of Pattani; the loss of civilian lives by the means of grenade explosions is indeed a tragedy. Thus, the writings of both writers serve as suitable narratives for the tomb and the event that it commemorates. But, how do the Malays of southern Thailand remember the event today? Do they think of the event as an incidence of "Siamese cruelty" as Bang Tah implied when he highlighted *Kubo Tok Ayah* to my attention?

## Malay Memories of the "Tragedy of 13 December 1975"

After my first visit to *Kubo Tok Ayah* with Ayah Leh, Bang Ae, and Bang Mat, I decided to find out Bang Tah's knowledge of the "Tragedy of 13 December 1975"; Bang Tah was the first person to highlight the existence of the tomb to me. To my surprise, Bang Tah told me that he knew little of the incident. Like many other Malays whom I met, Bang Tah heard of the event as well as the existence of the tomb from conversations with other members of the Malay community. Furthermore, the coincidence of the year of the occurrence of the event with Bang Tah's year of birth enhances Bang Tah's awareness of the occurrence of the unfortunate incident that many Malays,

including Bang Tah, refer to as the "*Perarakan Patani*" or "Patani Demonstration"[36].

Ayah Leh, on the other hand, was able to relate the event in greater detail. Perhaps the training that Ayah Leh received in history at Chulalongkorn University accounts, in part, for his interest in reading about the event. In fact, it was Ayah Leh who lent me his personal copy of the book written by Ahmad Fathy Al-Fatani (1994) as he encouraged me to read about the tradgedy. Ayah Leh admitted to me that he was not personally involved in the demonstration as he was still working in Bangkok at that time.

Bang Ae and Bang Mat had more personal accounts to tell. Both of them took part in that ill-fated demonstration. According to Bang Ae, who was a teenage student at a *pondok* in 1975, he was not very certain of the reasons and objective of the demonstration. He decided to take part in the demonstration when he heard rumors that the military had killed several Malay youth on a whim. He said that he was awed by the presence of such a massive crowd in front of the provincial administrative center. For him, the event displayed the unity of the Malays of southern Thailand as he recounted the extensive cooperation in logistical matters; "I can still remember that the womenfolk in Kampong Keli got together and prepared food for the demonstrators. When we got there, we distributed food to anyone within

[36] Henceforth, "Patani Demonstration" shall refer to the demonstration that began on 11 December 1975 and ended on 24 January 1976. The "Tragedy of 13 December 1975" shall refer specifically to the attack of civilian demonstrators by the Thai-state's security force.

reach, regardless of the villages that they came from." Bang Mat's account of the event was similar to Bang Ae's in many ways. Like Bang Ae, Bang Mat who originally hails from Yala was a student at a *pondok*. He, too, came to the demonstration site upon hearing about the "cruel murders" of the Malay youths.

The most heart-rending account of the "Tragedy of 13 December 1975" that I heard was from one of Bang Ae's acquaintance named Wan Soh. Now in his sixties, Wan Soh sells groceries at the travelling market which comes to Kampong Keli on Wednesdays. Finding an appropriate time and place to meet-up with Wan Soh was difficult as he was uncomfortable with the unnecessary attention that we may attract should we visit him at home; he claims that his home has been randomly monitored by the security personnel ever since his involvement in the "Patani Demonstration".

I finally met Wan Soh in the morning of 24 August 2005 as the Wednesday market was operating at Kampong Keli. To my surprise, Wan Soh was keen to talk about the "Tragedy of 13 December 1975" from the onset; most persons would take some time to discern if I was trustworthy. Wan Soh directed Bang Ae and I to a spot in the shade, giving us all a brief respite from the searing sun; coincidentally away from the attention of two soldiers who were 'providing security coverage' at the market.

Wan Soh claimed that he was personally involved in the organization of the "Pattani Demonstration",

> "I was involved in organizing the demonstration as a leader of one section of demonstrators; similar to the guerilla-style. We heard rumors that they were going to bomb us. I remember thinking that it will surely be the end for us should the bomb falls close to us. True enough, the bomb exploded close to where I was standing. The rain was falling heavily; nothing like the rain that I have experienced before. The water rose to this level (at this point Wan Soh pointed to his knees). I helped to carry two of my friends into the car and sent them to the hospital. One of them died, while the other one was badly injured on one side. I was very lucky to escape with minor injuries."

Wan Soh's emotions intensified as he recalled the events. Tears began to roll down his cheeks and his eyes were blood red. Using his hands to point to an area on the left-side of his face, Wan Soh told me that that area of his friend's face was blown off by the explosion. He said that he could still see images of his friends face vividly in his mind. Wan Soh, then, swiftly wiped away his tears.

> "I cannot really talk about this. I feel much pain here all the time (he pointed a finger at his heart). After the explosions, we shifted the demonstration to the central mosque. As the

> mosque is a religious place, the Siamese[37] would be slightly more constrained. We continued with the demonstration as we just wanted justice to be served as we desired before the bomb explosions."

My conversation with Wan Soh continued for several minutes more. Wan Soh's emotions and description of the events of the "Tragedy of 13 December 1975" saddened me. It is not surprising, then, that most Malays with whom I talked about the event remember it is a sad or painful episode in their community's history.

## The Impersonality of Historical Writings

Malay memories of the "Tragedy of 13 December 1975" is rather clear and similar to the master narrative of the account as exemplified by the writings of A. Malek (1993) and Al-Fatani (1994) as well as the information presented on the tomb itself; that the cruel[38] Thai-state, which was represented by its security force, bombed innocent participants of a peaceful demonstration. From my interaction with several Malay persons in southern Thailand, I learnt that the event is clearly remembered as the subjection of the Malays in southern Thailand to the cruelty of the Thai-state.

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[37] Here, Siamese or *siye*, in the Patani-Malay language, refers to the Thai-state. The meaning of the term *siye* has to be interpreted with caution. It may change to mean ethnic-Siamese or the Thai-state depending on the context within which it is used. Based on my experiences in southern Thailand, the Malays hardly accuse ethnic-Siamese residents of southern Thailand of being cruel to them. Thus, when they say "*kezolimae siye*", they usually refer to the "cruelties of the Thai-state".

[38] The adjective that is often used to label the nature of the Thai-state in the Patani-Malay language is *zalim*.

The writings of Al-Fatani (1994) and especially A. Malek (1993) on the "Tragedy of 13 December 1975" capture the general development of events in that fateful December. Writing at a more macro-level, they inform readers of actions, decisions, and negations of and between the elite representatives of the Malay demonstrators as well the Thai-state. This is rather common as group social memories tend to ignore the lived experiences of the individual members of the group. (Anderson 1991)

The oral recounting of the event by some Malays in southern Thailand, however, presents more personal, micro-level details that are not captured in written accounts of the event; the injuries, the suffering, the sadness, among others. It appears to me that some, and perhaps many, participants in the demonstration remain unsure of how to remember the event except that the way it unfolded was extremely unfortunate. Personal memories of violent episodes such as the "Patani Demonstration" remain vivid amongst older Malays who partook in the demonstration. For those who were not directly involved, were too young like Bang Tah, or was not born yet, the retelling of the events by members of their community sustains the remembrance of the "Patani Demonstration". The *Makam Shuhada 75* is, then, taken as the embodiment of the 'truth' of allegations of "Siamese cruelty" made by other, and in many cases older, members of their community; recall Bang Tah's recommendation that I visit *Kubo Tok Ayah* where I would be able to see the "attestation to Siamese cruelty". Such personal and collective memories of past violent episodes in relations

between the Thai-state and members of the Malays of southern Thailand are useful in trying to understand the present-day attitudes of members of the Malay community towards the Thai-state; indeed as Hobsbawm and Ranger have pointed out, social memories often disclose the functional and symbolic importance of a community's past in the politics within which it is presently located. (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Peifer 2001)

## "Tombs of Martyrs" as Monuments of Injustice

> "Today members of the public may witness the Tombs of the Martyrs stand tall in *Kubo Tok Ayah*, adding another monument in the list of historical legacies of Cabang Tiga, in specific, and the nation of Patani in general. This tomb was built with extraordinary attributes compared to other graves in the same cemetery including the tombs of the rulers of Patani." (Al-Fatani 1994: 192-193)[39]

Monuments are erected in many communities around the world to enhance the remembering of various aspects of human social life and organization such as political movements, war, monarchical figures, and religious faith, amongst others. Monuments may act as "memory beacons" (Peifer 2001) that are intended to give directions to how people should remember such events, movements, and persons.

[39] The translation is my own.

"Monuments contain, or point to, traces of collective memory, which is a way public memory could be produced." (Satha-Anand 2007: 13) The process of memory production at *Makam Shuhada 75* is circular as Satha-Anand's statement suggests. The information furnished on the wall of the tomb provides clues to the collective memories of some members of the Malay community in southern Thailand; that the fatal victims of the events of December 1975 are martyrs and that their deaths were a tragedy. Thus, the tomb is a result of collective remembering. Simultaneously, as the preceding paragraph has stated, the tomb functions as a monument that serves to steer the production of collective memory in regards to the "Tragedy of 13 December 1975" especially to first-time visitors like me who are initially unaware of the occurrence of the ill-starred events.

Although the erection of a monument is usually complemented with an accompanying narrative, monuments nonetheless remain ambiguous due to its "conceptualized and reified nature" (Tanabe and Keyes 2002: 6). Studies of two monuments in Thailand, the "Bullet Monument" in Narathiwat by Satha-Anand (2007) and the "Thao Suranari Monument in Nakhon Ratchasima by Keyes (2002), show that monuments are consistently caught in tussles for meaning that reflect power struggles in society. Meanings and narratives associated with monuments are often constructed and reproduced by various quarters that are involved in the socio-political milieu that surrounds the monuments. (Keyes 2002; Satha-Anand 2007; Troyansky 1987)

The "Patani Demonstration" is not always remembered as a two-partied conflict between the Malays and the Thai-state. A conversation between Bang Mat and me while we were on a visit to Yala added nuance to the narrative of the event. Bang Mat and I talked casually about the cemeteries that I have visited in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat amidst the sounds of rain splattering on the roof of the stilted house where we spent the night. Bang Mat appeared reluctant at first, but then went on to ask me for my opinion on the issue of whether it was right for the Provincial Islamic Committee of Pattani to bestow martyrdom onto the slain participants of the "Patani Demonstration". Sensing that Bang Mat had an opinion of his own, I asked him for the reason for his question.

> "I do not really agree that they are martyrs because the Pattani Demonstration involved a lot of secular politics. Actually the demonstrators were not just protesting against the Thai government. I remember clearly that many of us were shouting derogatory slogans against Kusoh[40] such as *Kusoh Kurap*[41]. If I remember correctly, the support of the

[40] Kusoh is the colloquial reference for Tengku Soh or Prince Soh. Kusoh is a descendant of the Raja of Jambu(now a sub-district in Amphoe Yaring, Pattani), a Bangkok-Muslim who was appointed to the throne of Jambu by the Rama I when Siam divided Patani into 7 provinces. See A. Malek, Mohd Zamberi

1993 Umat Islam Patani: Sejarah dan Politik. Shah Alam: HIZBI.

[41] *Kurap* is a type of skin-disease. Thus, the slogan "*Kusoh Kurap*" could either be taken as a slander or a curse.

demonstrators were divided amongst three politicians; Kusoh, Din Jerman, and Din Tok Minah[42]."

Bang Mat's comments show that individual members of the community are not passive supporters of narratives that are arranged and supported by the community's elites and historians. While it is true that the Thai-state was the main target of the crowd's protests, the crowd itself was not monolithic in its aims. The monumental *Makam Shuhada 75*, writings of A. Malek (A. Malek 1993) and Al-Fatani (1994), as well as most oral accounts that I have heard failed to portray such nuances in the unfolding of events associated with the "Patani Demonstration". Perhaps also the current political climate in the three provinces, where many Malays are suspicious of Thailand's security personnel, influence people's personal recounting of the "Patani Demonstration" as a two-partied conflict between the Thai-state and their community. Or, perhaps they intend to use me as a messenger to tell outsiders of the cruelty of the Thai-state; at least to those who read my thesis. Whatever the reasons are, Bang Mat's account of the event has highlighted the tendency of historiography to be detached from the lived experiences of persons who were involved in the event. It is for this reason, and the possible existence of others with their own personal accounts of the

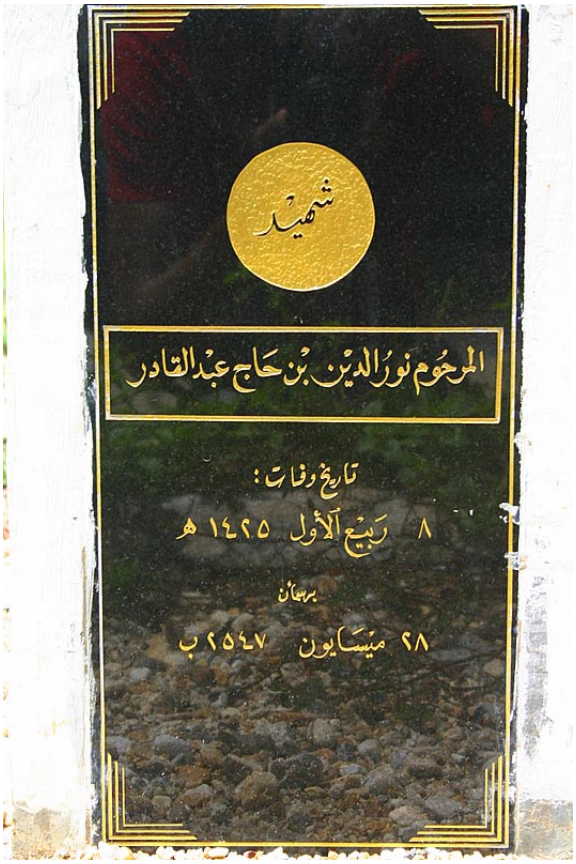
[42] Din Tok Minah is the descendant of another influential figure in the politics between the Malays of southern Thailand and the Thai-state, Haji Sulong. Haji Sulong was a Malay Islamic religious leader who submitted a petition to the Thai government in 1947. Subsequently, he was arrested and would later go missing. Many Malays believe that Haji Sulong became a victim of extra-judicial killings by the state's security forces.

event, that monuments always elude “final” interpretation. (Troyansky 1987: 123)

## *Monumentalizing the Shuhada of 28 April 2004 at Jaha and Sebayo*

*Makam Shuhada 75* is not the only burial site that has been constructed some Malays of southern Thailand to serve as a monument for the alleged violence of the Thai-state on their community. Some of the Malay fatal casualties of the violence that erupted in January 2004 are considered martyrs by some members of the Malay community and are buried in a similar manner to those at *Makam Shuhada 75*. I visited two of such burial sites; one in Jaha-district of Yala and another in Sebayo-district in Songkhla. These two burial sites, which are associated with more recent events, exemplify the ambiguity that characterizes such tombs and monuments. Villagers whom I met at both locations claim that both tombs are fashioned as sites of memory; memorializing the young men’s violent deaths allegedly at the hands of the Thai-state, which is represented by its security force.

**Graves of Martyrs at Kampong Tebu**




**Close-up of Gravestone**

On 24 August 2004, Bang Mat and I visited Kampong Tebu of Jaha- district in Yala. I decided to return to the village in order to learn more about the tombs of martyrs located in the village's cemetery that I saw while on a

visit with a sub-committee of the National Reconciliation Commission earlier. The graves of six of the young men who died in a clash with security officers on 28 April 2004 are arranged neatly in a straight row. The positioning of the individual graves as well as the tombstones seems to communicate a sense of unity and uniformity.

During the visit by members of the NRC, the village headman claimed that the villagers never intended to have the word "*shahid*"[43] inscribed onto the tombstones, but that the tombstones were already being prepared when the villagers placed their order at the workshop with the word already inscribed. The village headman's statement could be true, although I suspect that he may have made the statement for fear of potential reprisals from the Thai-government and the bureaucracy for the village's decision to categorize the alleged militants as martyrs. Many Malays in southern Thailand exercise much caution in divulging their personal opinions of the conflict for fear that they will be accused of being a part of, or at least sympathizing with, the insurgency. Indeed, several villagers informed me that they agree with granting of martyrdom on the six slain men as they maintained that the men sincerely believed that they were fighting for a cause; the six young men told everyone that they were going to carry out "*dakwah*"[44] activities.

[43] *Shahid* is a Malay-word of Arabic-origin that means "martyr". The term "*shuhada*", which has appeared many times in this chapter, is the plural term for *shahid*.

[44] "*Dakwah"* means "sermon". Dakwah groups usually comprise of several men who travel from village to another where they will stop-over to rest in the village mosque. They would then invite residents of the village to come to the mosque to listen to the leader of the group

Bang Mat and I also had the chance to listen to other stories that emerged as a consequence of the events of 28 April 2004. It is difficult to ascertain the veracity of these stories, as I have discussed in the preceding chapter; nevertheless these stories, or rumors, are important as a background for those intending to rationalize the suspicious attitude of many Malays towards the Thai-state. Several men questioned the need to kill the alleged militants as the security officers firearms could easily overwhelm the alleged militants, some of whom were only equipped with knives while others were unarmed. Furthermore, some residents of Jaha-district found the unusually quick response of the security personnel following the first gunshot to be dodgy. According to some residents, there would usually only be two soldiers guarding the area where the clash took place. However, that area was full of soldiers within five minutes after the initial gunshot on that day. Such questions and information led many residents to believe that the security force must have received some intelligence prior to the occurrence of the clash, but would like to kill the alleged militants, nonetheless, so as to communicate the Thai-state's intention to exterminate any militant movement in the three provinces.

The atmosphere throughout the conversation that I had with a group of residents at Ban Kejal was grim. The father of one of the victims managed to maintain his composure quite well during the conversation, although his

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lecture on religious issues. The group would sometimes grow in numbers as some residents of the village that they have visited may join them.

face could not hide the pain and sadness that he was feeling. He had to wipe off his tears several times during the conversation, affecting the mood of others involved in the conversation including myself. The group concurred that the tombs of the martyrs in their village are a witness to "Siamese cruelty" towards their community, and at the time of my fieldwork, villagers of Ban Tebu would visit the tombs almost daily to offer prayers for the six "martyrs" and maintain the state of the tombs as well as the cleanliness of the area around them. These visits augment the effectiveness of the tombs in maintaining remembrance of the regrettable event, at least amongst residents of Ban Tebu.

Bang Mat and I left for Sebayo-disticrt in Songkla in the morning after our visit to Jaha-district in Yala. Bang Seng, one of Bang Mat's relative from Jaha, accompanied us as Bang Mat did not know anyone from Sebayo; that would make it very difficult to talk to anyone about the burial site of the eighteen[45] men from the district that died on 28 April 2004 after clashing with security officers.

Initially it appeared as if we were not in luck. Bang Seng's friend had gone out to harvest *long kong*, a type of local fruit, at his orchard. We decided to have a drink at a coffee-shop in the village while we wait to see if Bang Seng's friend would come home soon after.

[45] The death toll at Sebayo was nineteen. These young men were members of a village football team. One of them, a resident of another district, was buried at a separate location.

I decided to talk to an old man who was also having a drink at the coffee-shop as we continued our wait. I asked him if he was familiar with the graves of the eighteen youth. The old man and the lady who was operating the coffee-shop made it a point to highlight to us that the eighteen young men who died on 28 April 2004 was not from their village; they were from the neighboring village instead. Maybe they were skeptical of our identities and do not want their village to be implicated in the unrest. Bang Seng concurred while also suggesting the possibility that the old man and the lady considered the young men who were killed as reprobates. Indeed, the old man told me that several adults advised the group of young men against carrying out their plans when they gathered at that coffee-shop on 27 April 2004. According to him, some of the young men responded by saying,

> "'You are too old to understand. If you don't want to join us, don't try to stop us.' Young people these days, they don't listen to older people. We know better because we have seen what happened twenty to thirty years ago."

After about one-hour of waiting, another man, who was probably in his thirties, and had joined our conversation at the coffee-shop offered to take us to the neighboring village to meet the father of one of the young men who died. Shortly before we left, the old man whom we suspect was our new guide's father-in-law, told him, "You must not go to the grave!" The old man's words and actions clearly indicate the deep-set fear that the on-going violence in the area has caused.

The person that we were brought to was Tok Nae Bae Teh[46], the headman of the neighboring village. We joined him at the outdoor platform where he was sitting and chatting with several other men. After giving greetings, we introduced ourselves. Tok Nae Bae Teh took a good look at Bang Mat and then said that he thinks that they may have crossed paths before. When Bang Mat told him that his late-father was a *dikir barat*[47] teacher, the Tok Nae Bae Teh managed a smile and concurred that he knew Bang Mat's late-father.

Bang Seng then asked Tok Nae Bae Teh if he personally knew one of the eighteen youth who was married to someone from Bang Seng's village. The headman answered by identifying that person as his son. So as it unfolded, Tok Nae Bae Teh, Bang Mat, and Bang Seng shared familial ties. This revelation paved the opportunity for me to ask questions regarding the graves. After I explained the intention behind my visit, Tok Nae Bae Teh told me that he had stopped consenting to interview requests as nothing beneficial had been achieved from them; he thinks that only the media gained from the interviews as they had something sensational to report on. However, he said that he was willing to answer any questions that I had as he wishes that I would "write about the incident and let others around the world know about it."

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[46] "*Tok Nae Bae*" in Patani-Malay or "*puu yai ban*" in Thai-language means "village headman".

[47] "*Dikir Barat*" is a type of traditional Malay performing art.

The village headman told us that he never thought that his son would get involved in violent activities. He said, “He was a good kid and quite a talented sportsman. He played football and sepaktakraw competitively at several levels.” Bang Seng concurred by adding that Tok Nae Bae Teh’s son would join his village’s youth for a game of soccer every evening after he moved into his wife’s maiden home following their marriage.

> “That night, he packed his things. I asked him about where he was going. He told me that he was going to join the *dakwah* activities. After that, I didn’t ask him any more questions because he always go on *dakwah* trips. Furthermore, *dakwah* is a good activity; which parent would disallow his son to do it? Then, the next day I heard that some youth had died after clashing with soldiers. Subsequently, someone called me to tell me that my son and grandson were involved. We had to wait until night before we were allowed to bring their corpses home. We buried all of them the next day. We couldn’t dig the ground the usual way. We had to use an excavator”, said Tok Nae Bae Teh with tears trickling down his face.

Tok Nae Bae Teh told me that the villagers decided not to wash the corpses before burying them. Such is the usual practice when burying Islamic religious martyrs. The headman’s wife who had joined us at the platform a few minutes earlier then called out to me lightly and related a story similar to

the headman's, drawing me out of the group's conversation. She was more emotional and had to wipe away her tears more often that the headman.

According to Tok Nae Bae Teh, the graves of the young men who died on 28 April 2004 are constructed as a place of memory. He added that the construction process of the grave was not yet completed as the funds donated by residents of the village was insufficient; thus, they opted to carry out the construction progressively. Tok Nae Bae Teh's wife then told us that some people claim that the graves and the surrounding area always smell nice.[48] The headman said that some villagers would congregate at the grave every Friday; they would go there after performing the prayer at dawn, say some prayers for the "martyrs", and then have breakfast together at a hut that has been constructed beside the graves.

By then, the conversation was becoming overwhelming for Tok Nae Bae Teh. He said that he can still feel the pain in his heart whenever he thinks or talk about the incident. He, then, suggested that Bang Mat, Bang Seng, and I, follow one of his friends to visit the burial site.

[48] Several people in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat have told me before that the burial sites of martyrs always have a lingering pleasant smell.

**Gated graves of martyrs at Sebayo**

**Temporary Tombstones**

We boarded Bang Seng's pick-up truck and travelled for five minutes along a narrow path amidst the foliage. Two concrete structures greeted us immediately upon arriving at the cemetery; the gated graves of the "martyrs" of 28 April 2004 and a hut adjoining it.

It was obvious that the construction of the burial site was incomplete. Tok Nae Bae Teh's friends briefed us of the village's plans to plaster and paint

the gate as well as purchase nice matching tombstones for the eighteen graves. The words “The Incident of 28 April” were engraved into the stairs leading up to the raised floor of the hut beside the graves. We took a peak into the holes in the concrete blocks that formed the gate and saw that the eighteen graves were arranged neatly with a pair of broken concrete blocks used as markers for each grave. Just like the graves of *shuhada* at *Kubo Tok Ayah* and Jaha, the arrangement of the graves and grave markers exude a sense of unity and uniformity. As Tok Nae Bae Teh said, “The villagers said that since they died together, we should bury them together.” Thus, the positioning of the graves at the entrance of the cemetery, its physical structure, the arrangement of the graves, as well as the engraved words on the stairs of the hut, clearly indicate the intention of the villagers to use the burial site as a place of memory where the villagers’ agency over memory production is articulated. Also, if the words of Tok Nae Bae Teh are a good indication of the sentiments of the villagers, then we may deduce that the villagers will remember the incident as an episode of the Thai-state’s injustice towards their community. The act of burying the corpses of the young men without washing them first, which is in line with the Islamic burial practice for martyrs, strengthens this claim.

However, as the Malay community’s experience with *Makam Shuhada 75* has pointed out, the monumental structure and its accompanying narrative does not guarantee that people’s memories of the incidents would be uniform. Like an art piece that is subject to the varying

interpretations of its individual viewers, monuments such as the graves of *shuhada* at *Kubo Tok Ayah*, Jaha, and Sebayo, is susceptible to multiple interpretations. Similarly, the individuals who are buried at the three monumental graves may not always be seen as "martyrs"; their titles as "martyrs" may be doubted, as Bang Mat did in regards to the *syuhaha* of December 1975. Nonetheless, most people with whom I talked about the incidents of December 1975 and 28 April 2004 seem to believe in the narratives that accompany these monumental graves. According to some residents of the villages in Jaha and Sebayo districts, they are aware that their efforts in constructing the graves will not guarantee that everyone will remember the incident in the same way as they have intended, but they felt that it was necessary for them to attempt to ensure that the injustice that members of their communities have been subjected to is not easily forgotten.

## Megalithic Statues: Monuments and Politics in Thailand

The twentieth century witnessed a proliferation of monuments in Thailand. The construction of national monuments in Thailand began with the erection of statues of the king of Siam during the reign of King Mongkut, or Rama IV, that lasted from 1851 through 1868. It quickly gained momentum during the next two reigns, that of King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh. By 1933, a year after the transition from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy in Thailand, a Department of Fine Arts was set up and placed

under to auspices the Ministry of Education to oversee the training and development of young Thai artists who would be commissioned to build official sculptures and monuments. (Poshyananda 1992; Wong 2006)

The role of monuments as a powerful 'accomplice' and vehicle for political ideologies has a very long history. In Southeast Asia, megalithic temples such as Angkor Wat as well as Borobudur are lucid examples of this link. In short, monuments may be used for the furtherance of the political agendas of the key political institutions of the day; the monarchy and government in contemporary Thailand. Public monuments reflect a "desire to promote official dogma" (Wong 2006: 146).

Statues of Thai kings, especially those of the ruling Chakri dynasty, are prominently featured in the collection of monuments that adorn Thailand's capital city, Bangkok. An example of such statues is the Equestrian Statue of King Chulalongkorn, which commemorates the fortieth anniversary of the ruler's reign. This statue's design was inspired by the statue of King Louis XIV on horseback in Versailles during his visit in 1907. (Wong 2006) Wong argues that this monument was instrumental in engendering Siamese absolute monarchism. "The image of King Chulalongkorn was the embodiment of the nation … It was through his grace and guidance that the country would progress and prosper." (Wong 2006: 34) Prior to Chulalongkorn's reign, Siamese kings have always ruled based on a system of patronage known as the *sakdina* system, in which powerful aristocratic families acted as the bureaucratic hands of Siam's rulers. (Reynolds 2006; Wong 2006) The Thai

king, presently King Bhumibol Adulyadej, continues to be highly revered, perhaps even considered sacred, in contemporary Thai society.

Monuments are also built to foster nationalist fervor in Thailand; although the message may differ or change from time to time and with changes of government. Despite not being known to be a democratic leader, Field Marshall Plaek Phibunsonggram (hereafter Phibun) commissioned the construction of a monument at Rajadamnern Avenue known today as the Democracy Monument in 1939. This megalithic monument commemorates the overthrow of the absolute monarchy by a coup d'état in 1932. Although this monument displayed a more inclusive vision of society through the featuring of 'ordinary people', Phibun's military background appears to have crept into the intended message of the monument. The military is glaringly figured in the relief panels that embellish the monument, especially in the panel of "Soldiers Fighting for Democracy". (Wong 2006)

The proliferation of monuments since the reign of Mongkut is not restricted to Bangkok. Many monuments have been erected in provinces outside the capital. Monarchic images continue to be featured in most provinces in Thailand that I have visited. The clock towers in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, are all emblazoned with a large picture of the present king. Elsewhere in Thailand, statues of heroes and heroines were built to serve as examples of the heroism of the individual and groups of Thais in defending their beloved nation. The monuments of the "Sisters Thao Thepsatri and Thao Srisunthorn" in Phuket, "Queen Suriyothai", "Princess Suphankalaya" in

Pitsanulok, “Bang Rachan villagers” in Singburi, and Thao Suranari in Nakhorn Ratchasima, among others, represent the loyalty, courage, and sacrifice of Thais from various strata of society in the face of foreign aggression in the past. (Keyes 2002; Rajanubhab 2000; Satha-Anand 2007; Wong 2006) Such monuments remind members of contemporary Thai society of the need to defend the sovereignty of their nation-state as well as the virtuousness of such character traits. These monuments are indeed provincial manifestations of the political ideals that various political elites advocate; these ideals are convenient to any political leader who wishes to uphold the oneness of the Thai nation-state.

## The Obscurity of the “Tombs of Martyrs”

The monumental graves discussed in this chapter do not possess the same prominence in Thai society that other monuments found in Thailand, which I have mentioned above, have. Like the “Bullet Monument” found in the compound of a police station in Narathiwat, which commemorates the clash between security officers and some Malays at Dusun Nyor in 1948, the monumental graves at *Kubo Tok Ayah*, Jaha and Sebayo districts, are “silent” (Satha-Anand 2007). These monuments are not featured prominently in Thailand’s socio-political landscape, unlike the above-mentioned monuments.

One of reasons for the silence of these monumental graves is that there is very little ‘physical interaction’ between them and people beyond

the communities that surround them. Most Malays in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, visit cemeteries only during certain occasions throughout the year. Many other monuments in Thailand such as statues of Thai kings in Bangkok, and regional heroes such as Thao Suranari and Queen Suriyothai, are revered by many Thai-Buddhists; throngs of people visit these statues regularly to pray and make offerings. (Keyes 2002; Satha-Anand 2007; Tanabe and Keyes 2002; Wong 2006) Islam, the religion of most Malays in southern Thailand, forbids its adherents from worshiping idols as well entities other than God; hence, the practice of worshipping at graves of saints, or *keramat*, has gradually been frowned upon leading to a huge reduction in such acts.

The silence of these monumental graves may also be due to some of their physical traits. Unlike monumental statues that have been mentioned, these graves are not megalithic. Furthermore, they are located within cemeteries amongst many other graves. These cemeteries are usually not found at the forefront of the town's landscape. Hence, the monumental graves at *Kubo Tok* Ayah, Jaha and Sebayo districts are less noticeable to people despite being physically prominent within the compounds of these cemeteries.

The socio-political circumstances surrounding these monumental graves also contribute to their silence. Monuments such as the national and regional statues mentioned earlier suit Thailand's nation-building projects as well as other elite political institutions in Thai society such as the monarchy and the military; thus, earning them a position amongst other national

monuments that are recognized by the Fine Arts Department. (Keyes 2002; Wong 2006)

The monumental graves discussed here do not serve the interests of Thai nationalism or any key political institution in Thailand. In fact, these monumental graves may be seen by some as being anti-state; although many Malays would deny this. As mentioned earlier, these graves are meant to act as beacons for the remembrance of the crimes of the Thai-state against the Malay community in southern Thailand. Hence, these monumental graves should remain clandestine as their narrative will not sit comfortably with many others in Thailand including her political elites. Such monuments of resistance are likely to remain publicly inconspicuous unless there is a change of hands at the top of the political structure whereby the new person or regime in power is able to use these monumental graves for the purpose of discrediting earlier regimes or if the new regime comprise actors in the resistance movement themselves.

According to Wong (2006), monuments need to interact with people's lives in order to remain relevant. The outbreak and continued occurrence of violence in southern Thailand contribute to the increased relevance of graves such as *Makam Shuhada 75* as well as those graves of "martyrs" located in Jaha and Sebayo districts. The violence that takes place almost daily acts as triggers for the remembering of the events of the "Patani Demonstration" as well as the events of 28 April 2004. Thus, despite the lack of 'physical interaction' between these graves and members of the Malay community,

many Malays retain memories of these events even after years and decades of their occurrences.

## Conclusion: Cemeteries as Windows to the Past

Studies of monuments in Thailand tend to focus on national and 'public' monuments; there is also a tendency for such monuments to be megalithic. (Keyes 2002; Poshyananda 1992; Wong 2006) This chapter employs a more inclusive categorization of "monuments" in this chapter by treating non-megalithic constructions such as *Makam Shuhada 75* and the graves of "martyrs" in Jaha and Sebayo districts as monuments. These graves have been treated as examples of non-national or 'non-public' monuments in this chapter.

Cemeteries are repositories of history; every grave is the abode of a person, who figured, although in varying degrees of significance, in the historical development of a community or society. Historical accounts of society should not be limited to the written, or even oral, accounts of its elite members. Ideally, it should be the aggregation of the life stories of every member of the society. However, it is probably impossible to combine the autobiographies of all of the society's members. But, it is worthwhile to identify graves that are socially significant, such as the ones discussed in this chapter, which may act as platforms through which we may begin our quest to study aspects of the larger community that hosts them.

This study of several graves of “martyrs” found in southern Thailand shows that many Malays maintain memories of past events whereby the Thai-state is deemed to have acted cruelly against members of their community. Such memories contribute to the sustenance of Malay suspicions and animosity for the Thai-state. The construction of these graves of “martyrs” is, in fact, an expression of resistance against the Thai nation-state; these graves and their accompanying narratives are meant to subvert the Thai-state’s official notion of these slain men as rebels or even terrorists. According to some Malays, this mode of resistance is apt because of the potential reprisals that their community may face if they adopt other less clandestine options. To highlight this position, I was told that the graves of the nine youth who were killed at Krisek Mosque on 28 April 2004 have not been constructed as a monument, unlike those found in Jaha and Sebayo districts, because of the massive attention that the clash at that mosque attracted due to the huge significance of the Krisek Mosque in the history of the Malays of southern Thailand. Hence, the construction of a monumental grave to commemorate these nine “martyrs” may draw chastisements and potential counter-action from the Thai state and possibly even other members of the Thai society.

# CHAPTER THREE

# THE PAST IN THE PRESENT: THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY IN PRESENT-DAY RELATIONS BETWEEN THE THAI NATION-STATE AND THE MALAYS OF SOUTHERN THAILAND

My first visit to southern Thailand took place in February 2002. I arrived as an ignorant visitor; unaware that there were local residents who could converse in Malay. Ayah Leh, who was working at the Prince of Songkhla University at that time, took me to Ban Keli where he thought would be a suitable place to base the community service project that I was organizing; the project involved a group of students from the National University of Singapore and eventually took place in May 2002.

After initial discussions with several of Ban Keli's community leaders, Ayah Leh told Bang Ae, whom I had just met, to accompany me to a coffee-shop while he went to look up some of his friends at their homes.

Bang Ae came across as a man of quiet disposition; he looked serious the whole time we talked. There was an aura of awkwardness between us as we both sipped at cups of coffee while exchanging a sporadic word or two. I decided to break the silence by divulging my ignorance of the local culture and the community's history. I told him that I did not know that there were many Malays living in Thailand. Bang Ae simply smiled and then said that the three provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat formerly made up one Malay

kingdom. He told me that the kingdom of Patani, a long time ago, was rich and very famous. Band Ae, then, pointed in the direction of the sea, which could be seen through a window at the coffee-shop and said that his father used to tell him that many trading ships would sail into Patani Bay and anchor there while trade was being conducted. He added that the older people in the village claimed that salt produced in Patani was very famous throughout the region. Bang Ae then sighed before saying that the situation has changed greatly.

Until the re-emergence of the violent conflict in southern Thailand, the Malays of that region seemed to have been forgotten; dissipated from many people's mental maps of Malay communities in the Southeast Asian region. A check with my friends and relatives in Singapore and Malaysia proved that I was not alone in ignorance. Many people in my parents' generation were also unaware of the existence of a large Malay population in southern Thailand; although a separatist conflict took place there as recently as the 1970s.

I continued to travel to various parts of Thailand after my first visit to the south in February 2002. I learnt that many Thais from other regions in Thailand also possess such a tenuous amount of knowledge about their countrymen who are ethnic-Malays. Similarly, very little is mentioned of the history of southern Thailand's Malays in Thailand public schools history syllabus.

This chapter is about the struggle of the Malays of southern Thailand against being assimilated into what they perceive to be a relatively homogenized national culture; one that emphasizes ethnic-Thai culture through language and Buddhism. Many of these Malays claim that they are contented to be citizens of Thailand, but take measures to ensure that certain aspects of their community's history and, consequently, ethnic identity are not obliterated. These actions are not an expression of separatism, but they reflect a desire for a more diverse understanding of what it means to be a Thai. Many of the Malays of southern Thailand feel that they are held in suspicion by many of their fellow citizens; indicating some lack of comfort amongst other Thais for the distinct ethno-cultural identity of the Malays of southern Thailand. They claim that they are sometimes treated differently by other Thai citizens when their identity as a Malay or Muslim from Pattani, Yala, or Narathiwat is divulged; they claim, however, that this does not happen in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. I have a personal experience that relates to this claim; this incident took place in October 2005.

I was then in Phuket Island to visit some friends. Shortly after I arrived at the bus terminal, a taxi driver who was looking for passengers tried to make small talk with me by asking, "Where did you come from?" I was not sure if he meant to ask for my country of origin or the place from which I had just arrived. I told him that I came from Pattani. He quickly asked, "Aren't you afraid? Living in Pattani?" I told him that I was, but I tried not to let my fear affect me too much. Suddenly, he launched into a diatribe, "Of course you

are not afraid. They (The insurgents) will not kill you. But, they kill my people! They kill my monks!" He, then, shook his head and left. I was shocked by his words. The experience made me think about how the Malays from Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat would feel if they were faced with a similar situation.

## What was Patani? : Contested histories of the Malays of southern Thailand

The historical kingdom of Patani is a contested entity. Historical writings and social memories of this kingdom, from which the present population of Malays in the southern Thailand provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, claim origin, can be generally divided into two strands; one falls within the narrative of Thailand's nationalist history while the other is rooted in traditional Malay notions of their community's past. It is important to be aware of these contested images of the Malay community's history as they are vital in shaping the varied and often conflicting perceptions of and attitudes towards the various parties involved in the on-going conflict in southern Thailand.

### *Malay Writings about "Patani"*

The image of Patani in most Malay writings coincides with the image that Bang Ae painted during our conversation at the coffee-shop that was described earlier. (A. Malek 1993; A. Malek 1994; Al-Fatani 1994; Syukri 2005; Teeuw and Wyatt 1970) These writings claim that the Kingdom of Patani as an independent kingdom that was ruled by generations of sovereign rulers between the earlier decades of the sixteenth century until it

was finally dealt its first defeat at the hands of Siam's army in 1786. (A. Malek 1993; A. Malek 1994; Syukri 2005)

The Kingdom of Patani is also purported to have figured prominently in the network of kingdoms in the Southeast Asian region. In fact, Patani also played host to many travelers and traders from Europe, the Middle East as well as various parts of Asia such as Japan and China. (A. Malek 1994)

The fame of the kingdom is captured in the words of an early seventeenth century German traveler named Mandelslohe,

> "Patani is a very prosperous country. The people of Patani are able to eat fruits of scores of different kinds each month. Chickens here lay eggs twice each day. The paddy is exceedingly plentiful; there are many kinds of meat such as beef, mutton, goose, duck, chicken, capon, peacock, deer, mouse-deer, and birds, together with hundreds of kinds of fruits." (Syukri 2005: 32)

Patani's prosperity was made possible, in part, by its position as a vibrant center of trade in the Southeast Asian region at that time. (A. Malek 1994; Al-Fatani 1994; Reid c1988-1993; Syukri 2005; Teeuw and Wyatt 1970) Patani's importance as a trading center came about, in part, by the declining trade of Melaka under Portuguese rule. (A. Malek 1994; Reid c1988-1993) Trading rights in Patani was so highly valued that the British and Dutch ships

exchanged fire as a result of a conflict over trading issues in Patani. (A. Malek 1994)

The Kingdom of Patani was also renowned for being at the forefront of Islamic scholarship in the Southeast Asian region. (A. Malek 1993; A. Malek 1994; Al-Fatani 1994; Al-Fatani 2001; Reid c1988-1993; Syukri 2005) Malay writings on Patani's history point out how Islamic scholars from Patani traveled to various parts of the Southeast Asian region and even went as far as Mecca in search of, as well as spread, knowledge of the religion. (Al-Fatani 2001) In July 2007, I met a Madurese Islamic religious teacher, who lived in Mecca for approximately a decade, who told me that Islamic scholars from Patani such as Sheikh Daud al-Fatani and Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani count amongst the most prominent Islamic thinkers of Malay-origin. Both scholars wrote and published books quite extensively in the Malay as well as Arabic language. (Abdullah 1990; Abdullah 2005; Al-Fatani 2001; Sujimon 2003) Some of their books are still being studied by Muslims in the contemporary era. Hence, due to the importance of Patani as a center of learning amongst Muslims of Southeast Asia as well as the esteemed Islamic scholars it produced, the Kingdom of Patani earned its reputation as '*serambi Mekah*'[49] amongst some Muslims in the region.

The historical Kingdom of Patani's pre-eminent past engenders pride amongst Malays of southern Thailand, even in the present-day. The kingdom

[49] "*Serambi Mekah"* is translated as "The Veranda of Mecca".

is memorialized by members of the contemporary Malay population of southern Thailand as a glorious independent political entity that was prosperous in trade and prominent in Islamic scholarship as exemplified by the following quote from A. Malek who referred to Patani as a "symbol of Malay glory" (1994: 12-55)

> "The sixteenth century shows Patani as a most prominent empire in the Malay world. It attracted both regional and international traders from the East and the West. The prosperity of Patani shows that Patani had achieved the status of a strong and stable economy. This achievement was due to the wisdom of the Malay rajas of Patani. They are the symbols of the success of traditional Malay system of governance. It is from this prosperity that Patani's cultural achievements were gained such as in the realm of knowledge and language among others." (A. Malek 1994: 14)

This understanding of Patani's history is well-documented in Malay-language sources as noted above. But, how much detail do the Malays of southern Thailand actually remember about their community's past in their everyday discourses?

## *"Patani" in Malay Memories*

There was a question that always plagued my mind whenever I pass the directional signboard, while traveling along the Pattani-Narathiwat

highway, which points to “Phaya Inthira Cemetery”; who was Phaya Inthira? Non-Malay names that appear on signboards along this highway are quite a rarity. I found out later that Phaya Inthira was also known as Sultan Ismail Syah, the first ruler of Patani who converted to Islam. (Syukri 2005) Thus, “Phaya Inthira Cemetery” is also known as “*Makam Sultan Ismail Syah*” by the Malays.

*Makam Sultan Ismail Syah* is located in Ban Pare in Amphoe Muang, Pattani province. At the entrance to the cemetery, one is greeted with a signboard that provides the visitor with brief information on Phaya Inthira. The information signboard at the cemetery states in English that “Phaya Inthira, otherwise known as Sultan Ismail Syah, was the first governor[50] of Pattani to have changed his belief to Islam. He ruled the province during 1500 - 1530 AD.”

After reading the signboard, Bang Ae and I approached an elderly man who had just exited the nearby mosque. After Bang Ae and I introduced ourselves, the man introduced himself as Khruu Ding[51]. I told Khruu Ding that I was doing research on historical graves in southern Thailand. Khruu Ding managed a smile on hearing about my research topic and told me that I had come to the right place as the tombs of several rulers of Patani was located at several locations within Ban Pare. He, then, began to relate the story of

[50] Several English-speaking members of the Malay community whom I spoke to disagreed with the identification of Sultan Ismail Syah as a “governor”. They claim that he was actually a sovereign ruler and not an official of the Siamese court.

[51] “*Khruu”* means “teacher” in Thai-language.

Sultan Ismail Syah's conversion to Islam. His narration of the story; it was strikingly similar to Ibrahim Syukri's (2005) account of the same event. Interestingly, Khruu Ding then told me that he knew very little about Patani's history while he was still working as a teacher; even though he taught history at a secondary school. He only found out more about Patani's history from reading books after he retired from the teaching profession. He said that Malays in southern Thailand tend to know little of their community's history. He attributed this to a lack of exposure of regional history in Thailand's education system. He asserted that students are more likely to know more about "Bangkok's history"[52] than their own.

Khruu Ding advised me to visit the tombs of the female rajas of Patani located within the same village. While visiting the other tombs, I approached some youths who were sitting at the *wakaf*[53]. They were able to point out the tombs and provide the names of the different female rajas. They claim that the tombs of these rajas were pointed out to them by the older members of their village community. None of them, however, were able to relate any historical account or stories about the rajas. They said that they were told by the older people in their village that these rajas had once ruled Patani. The lack of historical knowledge amongst these youths matches what Khruu Ding

[52] It is quite common for Malays in southern Thailand to refer to Thailand's nationalist version of the nation-state's history as "*sejarah Bangkok"* or "Bangkok's history". Some Malays told me that "Bangkok's history" is a "big lie" or *"bohong besar*" that was created to justify the Bangkok-dynasty's rule. This issue will be discussed later in this chapter.

[53] A hut, which is often used as a resting area, for visitors of cemeteries in the three Muslim provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat.

had remarked earlier. Nevertheless, the tombs of Sultan Ismail and the succeeding female rajas from his lineage go down as sites of remembrance of the historical kingdom of Patani. To the present-day community, these tombs are links to their past. Although they know little of their past, what is clear to them is that Patani was an independent Malay-Muslim kingdom and had been ruled by their own sovereign rulers.

This lack of intimate knowledge about the history of the Kingdom of Patani, from which the present-day Malay population of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, claims origin, is common amongst members of the Malay community. Most Malays whom I have met since my first visit to southern Thailand in 2002 are able to identify the Kingdom of Patani as a glorious independent kingdom in history and was economically prosperous, as Bang Ae had implied during our conversation at the coffee-shop.

Ayah Leh suggests that the Malays' lack of detailed knowledge in regards to their community's history is the consequence of an absence of reading culture amongst them; Bang Ae, however, thinks that the issue of the lack of reading culture amongst the Malays must be elaborated. He concurs that the Malays of southern Thailand generally do not take to books too easily; however, he says that it is important to acknowledge the dearth of literature on the history of the Malays in southern Thailand. Furthermore the literature on this subject matter is generally unavailable in the three provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat.

Wan Soh claims that, in the 1970s, many Malays throughout southern Thailand burnt their personal collection of historical literature about their own community. He said that the Thai military personnel, then, would conduct raids in people's houses to see if they kept such literature; he claims that literature on the history of the Malays of southern Thailand was considered seditious. According to him, these raids were carried out more frequently following the "Patani Demonstration' of December 1975.

Members of the Malay community who possess knowledge of their community's history could not share their knowledge freely in public in the past; especially during periods of heightened Malay armed resistance such as the 1970s and 1980s. Doing so may make them vulnerable to persecution by the Thai-state. I was told by some Malays that male teachers had to be particularly careful as they were more vulnerable to accusations of harboring separatist intentions by security personnel.

Thus, circumstances in the political and security environment in southern Thailand were vital in contributing to a lack of knowledge amongst the Malays of southern Thailand in regards to their community's past. However, certain changes in Thailand's political environment have enabled the issue of the history of its Malay population to be discussed more publicly. As democracy began to take root following the withdrawal of the military government in 1992, space for the discussion of regional histories such as that of the Malay-dominated provinces in southern Thailand grew. According to Bang Ae and Bang Mat, several Malay intellectuals were able to deliver

speeches about their community's history in villages around the three provinces following the change from military-rule to civilian-rule.

Some Malays, however, told me that public speeches about the history of the Kingdom of Patani are no longer carried out in villages in the current political climate. Even though they alleged that the objective of these speeches is to preserve local understanding of their community's past, they claim that the risk for the speakers to be accused of trying to incite the Malays to demand independence from Thailand is too great. Likewise, many Malays are nervous about keeping literature on the subject in their personal possession. Bang Ae requested for me to keep several of his books such as a copy of the *Hikayat Patani*. According to Bang Ae, it would be easy for me to justify my possession of the book as I could claim that I was using it for academic research purposes. Although I thought, at that time, that that reasoning would not help if I was indeed caught with a possession of the book, I agreed to Bang Ae's request as I felt obliged to lighten the stress that he was already undergoing as a result of fear generated by the daily occurrence of violence in southern Thailand.

So, the lack of available literature and the sparse public space for historical discussion contribute to the tenuousness of the contemporary Malay community's knowledge of their history; but, some people seem to know the history of their own village communities more intimately.

The first cemetery that I visited in southern Thailand was *Kubo Datok*; this cemetery is located in Ban Dato, which is located in Yaring-district of Pattani province. *Kubo Datok* hosts several *keramat*, of which the grave of Tok Panjang is most renowned. I was amused by the village's *Tok Imam's*[54] recounting of the events surrounding Tok Panjang's passing.

According to the the *Tok Imam*, the establishment of the cemetery at Ban Dato was due to an event that took place during the reign of Raja Biru between 1616AD-1624AD (Teeuw and Wyatt 1970) Upon her ascension to the throne, Raja Biru concentrated on the fortification of Patani's armory in order to preserve Patani's independence; Siam had begun showing its interest to invade Patani with an attack in 1603. Raja Biru, thus, issued an embargo against the trade of brass. This material was intended to be used for the construction of canons that would fortify Patani's defense against Siam's offensives.

There was a trader of Arab descent by the name of Syeikh Gombak who was trading in Patani at that time. According to the *Tok Imam*, Syeikh Gombak was unaware of the embargo and continued to trade his supply of brass. On one unfortunate night, guards who were patrolling at the beach caught his servant, Abdul Mu'min, who was transporting the brass to its buyer. Upon hearing of the incident, Raja Biru sentenced Syeikh Gombak and his servant to death. Their corpses were then thrown into Sungai Parit Kedi.

[54] *Tok Imam* is the Islamic religious leader of the community.

An incredible incident then took place. The corpses stood vertically instead of floating horizontally and started traveling, as if walking, along the river with the flooding and ebbing of tide in the river. This incident continued for three days after which Raja Biru allowed for the corpses to be transported across the bay for burial upon the requests of villagers who had become afraid from witnessing the events that had unfolded.

The corpses of both Syeikh Gombak and his servant lengthen themselves as they were about to be buried. This incident earned Syeikh Gombak the title of *Tok Panjang*[55]. Eventually the two corpses were successfully buried side-by-side at the present site. Following that incident, the cape, which was formally unpopulated, began to attract residents. The livelihood of the fishermen in the new village was prosperous and the fishermen believed that this was due to the blessing from God was attained with the help of *Tok Panjang*.

The story of *Tok Panjang* that was related by the *Tok Imam* is very close to its account in *Hikayat Patani*. However in *Hikayat Patani*, Syeikh Gombak's decision to continue trading in brass had been blamed on his own greed or entrepreneurial motives instead of a lack of awareness of the embargo on brass trade that had been decreed by Raja Biru. Such explanations would not be well accommodated by the Ban Dato community whose origin has been linked to the sitting of Syeikh Gombak's grave.

[55] *Tok* is a shorten version of *Datuk*, which is an honorary title or a symbol of one's revered status in the past. *Panjang* means long in Malay.

Like monuments, the past is exposed to multiple interpretations and revisions. Although the *Hikayat Patani* has emerged as a leading reference source for the history of the Malays of southern Thailand, oral histories may transmit different versions of the events that are described in the text; such as the recounting of the story of Tok Panjang by the *Tok Imam* of Ban Dato.

Bang Mat has an interesting hypothesis about the story of *Tok Panjang*. While traveling in a van to Narathiwat one day, Bang Mat asked for my opinion on the narrative on the event. I was surprised by the question; sensing that he wanted to comment on the event, I asked him to divulge his own thoughts about it.

Bang Mat thinks that *Tok Panjang* was actually the victim of slander. He told me that *Tok Panjang* was, in fact, a religious teacher. He added,

> "If we imagine the Malay society at that time, there were probably two groups of influential people: members of the ruling court and the *ulama*[56]. I think that *Tok Panjang* was a very famous *ulama* with a strong following; thus, the raja felt threatened. So, she devised a plan to assassinate him. The story of *Tok Panjang* in the *Hikayat Patani* was the ploy of the ruling court. At that time, the common people cannot resist the orders of the ruler. Thus, no one could stop the execution of *Tok Panjang* and his servant. So, what his students did was

[56] "Ulama" means "religious scholar".

> to relocate their homes close to his grave after they had buried him; there is a lot of *berkat*[57] from being close to him."

Once again, Bang Mat's critical treatment of the interpretations of past events amazed me; his words are proof that members of society, at least in southern Thailand, are not passive in consuming narratives of their community's past that are imposed by both Malay and Thai elites. Unfortunately, not all, and perhaps not many people, are as critical as Bang Mat is. As Bang Ae puts it, "For many people, knowing that Patani was an independent kingdom that was prosperous is good enough; the cemeteries of sultans and rajas are the evidences that show the truth about our interpretation of the community's past."

## *"Patani" as Siamese Territory: "Patani" in Thailand's Nationalist History*

In the other strand of historiography, which is rooted in Thailand's nationalist history, the Patani Kingdom is not seen as a sovereign political entity, but as a territory of Siam. For example, the term used to refer to the ruler of Patani is "governor" and not raja, similar to the information furnished on the signboard at *Makam Sultan Ismail Syah*. (Syamananda 1973: 50) In other parts of his book, which is entitled A History of Thailand, Rong Syamananda claims that the European traders would seek the permission of the ruler of Ayutthaya before trading with Patani. Although he identified Patani as a "Thai vassal" at some point (1973: 60), he also treated the refusal

[57] "*Berkat*" means blessings from God.

of a Patani raja to send the tributary *bunga emas*[58] to King Prasattong of Ayutthaya as a declaration of "independence" (1973: 69). The emphasis of the right to make decisions involving Patani by Ayutthaya as well as the reference terms used to refer to Patani and its ruler clearly indicates Syamananda's view of Patani as a subordinate of, and even a territory belonging to, Ayutthaya. Such works of history are influenced by Thailand's nationalist history which is founded on the writings of Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (henceforth, Damrong). Damrong played a pivotal role in fashioning Thai national consciousness; especially through the founding of Siam's modern education system as well as the centralization of Siam's bureaucracy. (Sivaraksa 1980) According to him (Rajanubhab 1993), Patani had always belonged to Siam. But, why is Patani treated different in Thailand's nationalist history? Is there a history to this history?

## A History of Thailand's history

Prior to the modernization of the bureaucracy during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), Siam's political structure was loosely organized around a tributary system. (Suwannathat-Pian 1988; Winichakul 2004) This system is similar to Wolters's (1999) notion of the *mandala* political system whereby weaker states arrange themselves in the spheres of influence of more powerful states. (Suwannathat-Pian 1988; Winichakul 2004; Wolters 1999) In the case of Siam, weaker neighboring states such as the Malay states of Patani and Kedah, which are located within its sphere of influence, were

[58] An ornamental tree made from gold and silver.

required to pay tribute by submitting the *bunga emas*. The act of sending the customary *bunga emas* indicates respect and recognition for the military strength of the tributary overlord. Traditionally, the tributary states had their own bureaucratic institutions and Siam seldom intervened in the governance of its tributaries. (Winichakul 2004) Hence, Siam's tributary states were largely independent as long as they continued sending the *bunga emas* consistently. In fact, whenever the power of the ruler of Siam weakened, its tributaries, especially the Malay kingdoms, would exploit the situation by stopping the practice of submitting the *bunga emas*, refuse to supply troops upon the request of the Siamese king, or even switch to another overlord. Sometimes, a smaller kingdom may even pay tribute to two overlords. (Suwannathat-Pian 1988; Syukri 2005; Teeuw and Wyatt 1970; Winichakul 2004) Such was the nature of the *mandala* system of power in pre-colonial Southeast Asia. Each *mandala* would expand and contract in conjunction with the increase and decrease in the power of the ruler of the kingdom at the center of the *mandala*. (Wolters 1999)

The looseness of the power arrangement between Siam and its tributaries cannot be understated. In fact, this issue is at the center of the contention between traditional Malay and Thai-nationalist interpretation of the nature of Patani's relationship with Siam; was Patani an independent nation or a territory of Siam?

In Thongchai Winichakul's book entitled "Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation" (2004), he showed that the territorial conception

of Siam is a modern development. He did this through an intimate study of the history of mapping in Thailand where he traced the changes in mapping techniques and technology employed by the Thais over time. Prior to the reign of King Mongkut, the maps of the kingdom did not reflect geological reality. However, Mongkut, who was interested in science, caught on to the modern technology of map-making. Learning from Siam's experiences in a series of boundary disputes with the British and the French, Mongkut realized the importance for Siam to create a modern map of itself that reflects physical reality. Cartographic survey missions were, consequently, started during Mongkut's reign and intensified during the succeeding reign of his son, Chulalongkorn.

The quest for the creation of the modern scientific map of Siam was not without problems. The establishment of the boundary between Siam and French Indochina engendered a lot of disputes between the two nations, which culminated in a confrontation between the armed forces of both nations in April 1893. (Winichakul 2004; Wyatt 2003) During the event, two French gunboats successfully passed through Siam's fort at Paknam and sailed up the Chaophraya River to Bangkok. After successfully establishing the naval blockade, the French demanded that Siam acknowledge French rule over the whole of Lao territories, east of the Mekong River, as well as some territories in Cambodia (Wyatt 2003); humiliated and realizing their own vulnerability, Siam conceded.

## History or Myth?

According to Anderson, a nation is an "imagined community"; "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1991: 6) Yet, what precipitates the image of communion that Anderson mentions?

The gravity of history in the formation of human organizations such as nations is well-noted. (Anderson 1991; Gillis 1994b; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Winichakul 2004) National history is an invented memory that is shared and believed by people who may not know, and possibly will never know, one another and yet believe that they share a common past. (Gillis 1994b) The belief that the nation as a primordial entity has a long history buttresses its pursuit, and maintenance, of solidarity amongst its citizens. Thus, the notion of a shared past is significant for a nation to perpetuate a commitment to a shared future amongst its citizens; without which, the nation will cease to exist.

Following the Crisis of 1893, French and Siamese mapping officials were convened with assistance from the British. The result was the publication of two maps of Siam in 1897. (Winichakul 2004) The creation of a national history, then, became imperative if Siam was to survive this rupture in the kingdom's history. A new narrative had to be created and disseminated to peoples who populated its newly created geo-body to create a sense of belonging to Siam.

The creation of the new history of Siam, and Damrong was instrumental in this project, victimized indigenous histories such as the traditional Malay interpretation of the Kingdom of Patani. Tributaries of Siam at the peripheries, such as Patani, were suddenly treated as natural biological components of the nation's geo-body. The "national myth" (Smith 1991) that was successfully produced served the needs of the power holders by advocating the continued legitimacy of the ruling elites of Siam. The ruling elites could now call upon the "people of Siam"[59] to unite in the face of foreign threat.

The inception of a nation-building campaign followed the creation of Siam's geo-body and national history. This fabricated national history was then promoted through this campaign in the form of songs, plays, fictions, as well as subjects taught in the public education system. (Barme 1993; Winichakul 2004)

The success of Thailand's nation-building campaign is pronounced. Indigenous conceptions of the past have been significantly sidelined. For example, the teaching of Thailand's national history in public schools contributes to the lack of intimate knowledge amongst the Malays of southern Thailand for their community's history; as has been described earlier. Amongst the non-Malay citizens of Thailand, the following statement made by a friend of mine who hails from Chiang Mai is telling of the extent of

[59] With the creation of the new national myth, a top-down political exercise imposed the grouping of the communities of the various tributaries under one Siamese flag.

the influence that Thailand's national history has on some of its citizens' conception of the nation,

> "Where do all these Malays (in southern Thailand) come from anyway? I think we should just send them back. They are so ungrateful. It is already good enough that we allow them to live on our land!"

Thus, the strands of historical narrative that members of a society are exposed to is pivotal; it affects people's conception of the nation's past, what the society is in the present and what it should be in the future. It is not surprising then that the Malays of southern Thailand are often seen by some members of Thai society as outsiders as well as a chronic problem for the nation-state; as my friend, and he is not alone in making such statements to me, who is quoted above implies.

## After The Defeat: Malay Memories of Collective Suffering after Siam's Invasion of Patani in 1786

The history of the Malays from southern Thailand is a history of rebellions if one adopts the perspective that is informed by Thailand's national history. The view of many Malays of southern Thailand of their community's past after Patani's defeat to Siam in 1786, however, can be described as a history of suffering; a history of "Siamese cruelty"; and injustice. This was the impression that I get from engaging with Malays from various walks of life in southern Thailand as well as from my readings of

Malay historical writings. (A. Malek 1993; A. Malek 1994; Al-Fatani 1994; Syukri 2005)

In the previous chapter, the memorializing efforts of some Malays in regards to certain violent clashes between members of their community and agents of the Thai-state, which occurred in recent decades, have been discussed. Due to the lack of authority to express their interpretations of this event very blatantly, monumental graves have been built in order to promote their interpretations of these events, which may be seen as subversive by the Thai-state.

Several people I spoke to told me of the Thai-state's cruel treatment of the Malays of southern Thailand. These stories are transmitted orally amongst members of the contemporary Malay community in southern Thailand; the Malay narrators of these stories often claim that the stories were conveyed to them from preceding generations of their community.

These narratives, which are usually referred to as "*kisah sedih*" or sad events, are a recurrent topic of conversations amongst many Malays of southern Thailand. The earliest sad event that is retained in memory is associated with the defeat of the Kingdom of Patani by the Siamese around 1786. The Malays often refer to this event as *Musoh Tani*[60]. Interestingly, the story was first related to me in Bangkok by a Malay friend from southern

[60] Actually, "*Musoh Tani"* means "Patani War". In oral accounts, the date of *Musoh Tani* is not clear; sometimes the first defeat of Pattani to Siam in 1786 is referred to as *Musoh Tani Lama* or the "Older Patani War". Another event that has been labeled as *Musoh Tani* is a rebellion in Patani that took place in 1832 that was successfully quelled by Siam's soldiers.

Thailand who is in his mid-twenties while taking a boat ride along Saen Saeb Canal in the city.[61]

He told me that many of Siam's war captives at that time[62], including the Malays, were forced to dig the Saen Saeb canal with their bare hands. Many Malays in southern Thailand also told me that large earrings were pierced into the earlobes of the Malay war captives and subsequently linked using poles by Siam's soldiers. This served as deterrence to anyone who planned to escape during the journey from Patani to Bangkok. Other accounts told of rattan rods being poked into holes that have been punctured through the Malay war captives' Achilles tendons for the same purpose. I cannot ascertain the veracity of these stories, but for many Malays, the presence of various Malay residential communities along the Saen Saeb Canal is a hint at the credibility of such accounts. Furthermore, "*saen saeb*" means "one hundred thousand stinging pain"; therefore linking the canal with memories of tremendous pain and suffering.

So far allegations of Siamese cruelty that have been described in this thesis are limited to the physical harming of the Malays by agents of the Thai-

[61] Saen Saeb Canal is one of the major canals in Bangkok water-based public transportation network. Saen Saeb means "extreme pain".

[62] It has been mentioned in an earlier footnote that there is often confusion over the dates of the sad events or *kisah-kisah sedih*. The construction of the Saen Saeb Canal began in 1837; thus, it is highly likely that the relevant *Musoh Tani* was the Malay rebellion that occurred in 1832. See

Tanabe, Shigeharu

1977 Historical Geography of the Canal System in the Chao Phraya Delta. Journal of the Siam Society 65(2):23-72.

state. Some Malays of southern Thailand, however, claim that the injustices that they have been subjected to by agents of the Thai-state extend beyond physical violence.

According to Bang Ae, he and Bang Mat had attended a vocational course by the Thai army. He claims that interaction between the instructors, who were soldiers, and the trainees, some of whom are Malays, went very well until the closing ceremony. At this ceremony, the trainees were presented with medals by a senior army officer. Bang Ae described the ceremony:

> "They placed a framed picture of the King on a table. They told us to bow to the picture and then the officer would place the medal around our necks. We, the Malays, refused to do that. The soldiers then got angry and accused us of being disloyal to the King as well as Thailand. The atmosphere was very tense. We (the Malays) decided to call some *ulama* to explain to the soldiers that Muslims cannot bow to objects as it is against the religion; it is tantamount to idol worship. The *ulamas* came and tried to explain this to the officer, but they insisted that we followed their orders or we won't be given the medals. In the end, we decided not to take the medals. After all, we attended the course for the knowledge; not to receive medals."

The incident showed the intricacies of inter-faith relations in Thailand. Bang Ae concedes that not all Thais who are non-Buddhists are as uncompromising, in regards to religious differences, as the soldiers involved in the incident. Nonetheless, he thinks that the incident showed how convenient it is for the Malays of southern Thailand to be accused of disloyalty to the Thai nation-state and its king. Bang Ae asks, "Why can't we just respect one another's religious beliefs?" It is likely that the perception of the propensity of the Malays of southern Thailand to rebel against the Thai nation-state is ingrained amongst Thailand's security officers who are entrusted with the duty to protect the sovereignty of the nation-state and its key institutions such as the monarchy.

## Fear, Memory, Identity, and Resistance

> "Life in southern Thailand is not ideal, but we can survive here; it is livable. Generally, we can continue doing the things that we like, and avoid the things that we don't like. But, sometimes they (the Thai government and its security forces) make it difficult for us to live here; as if they don't want us. That's the problem." – Bang Tah

It has been stated in chapter one that most Malays of southern Thailand choose to remain as non-partisans in the on-going armed conflict that has claimed thousands of lives. According to Bang Tah, the living conditions for the Malays in southern Thailand are manageable despite the complaints that they have. He asserts that the Malays are not the only ones

who have complaints about life in Thailand; “Everyone complains”, says Bang Tah. In saying that “sometimes they make it difficult for us to live here” Bang Tah was referring to the attitudes that are displayed and actions that are taken by the government as well as Thailand’s security forces in their handling of the on-going violence. He says that the deep distrust that the state has for the Malays is hurting. Bang Ae and Bang Mat think that it is unfair for the majority of the Malays to bear the brunt of the suspicion of the Thai nation-state just because of a few militant members. “How are we supposed to live like this? Because of their tactics, our relationships with our fellow villagers are affected!” said Bang Ae in reference to the surveillance policies of the Thai-state that has been described earlier.

This thesis has shown that the non-partisanship of many Malays of southern Thailand in the armed conflict in that region of the country must not be taken to indicate political passivity. These Malays engage in resistance against the insurgents as well as the Thai-state. It is important to note that the mounting of resistance is not predicated only on values such as bravery; fear is also instrumental in determining a person or group’s decision to resist those who attempt to govern their actions. Thus, resistance involves the adoption of calculated risks.

In chapter one, the resolve of many Malays against taking sides with the insurgents as well as the Thai-state, is interpreted as their resistance against the domineering political ambitions of either party in the conflict. In the process, they have in fact adopted a third position; that is to defend their

right to a peaceful life. These Malays have exercised agency in their resistance against the agendas of the conflicting parties despite the climate of fear that envelopes their socio-political environment, which in turn is the intended consequence of the panoptic surveillance strategies of the insurgents and the Thai-state.

Fear of punishment from the Thai-state also shapes the modes of resistance that is adopted, as well as the issues that are taken up in resistance, by some Malays of southern Thailand. Many Malays are aware that resisting the Thai-state through participation in the armed resistance may bring about grievous repercussions; the deaths of more than one hundred alleged militants at the behest of Thailand's security forces on 28 April 2004 is one extreme example. Many Malays' refusal to join the armed resistance movements is, thus, a pragmatic choice as many of them believe that the insurgents are fighting a losing battle because they cannot match the strength of the Thai security forces' firepower as well as manpower.

Some Malays resist the Thai-state's interpretations of certain aspects of their community's history; especially the history of relations between them and the Thai nation-state. The construction of "tombs of martyrs" as monuments of Malay resistance against the Thai-state has been discussed. These tombs elevate the social standing of these slain men to community heroes; martyrs who sacrificed their lives in their struggle for their community to be treated with justice. It is likely that these individuals would be remembered as trouble-makers if the production of memories of the

events associated with their deaths is left solely the prerogative of the Thai-state. Yet, it is possible that the Thai-state is aware of the existence of these monumental tombs of martyrs. It appears as if the Thai-state is willing to tolerate the honoring of these "trouble-makers" as through these tombs as long as they remain largely inconspicuous. I have often been told by some members of the Malay community that these tombs are not meant to incite separatist sentiments amongst members of their community, but simply to serve as a site of memory.

The intensity of Malay resistance against the Thai-state's domination over historical production, however, increases and abates in relation to changes in the socio-political conditions surrounding the relations between the Thai nation-state and their Malay population. For example, public speeches regarding these issues were delivered by Malay intellectuals during the 1990s when democracy was beginning to take root in Thailand after the re-introduction of civilian governance in 1992. The on-going violence, however, has resulted in lesser opportunities for such speeches to be made in public. This does not mean that members of the Malay community in southern Thailand have stopped discussing their own interpretation of incidences of violence. The construction of the tombs of martyrs of 28 April 2004 in Jaha and Sebayo ratifies this view.

It has also been argued that historical narratives influence people's conceptions of their society in the present-day and what their society should be in the future. For people who are exposed solely to Thai-nationalist

historical accounts, the Malays of southern Thailand are likely to be viewed as a disloyal group of people who always rebel against the Thai nation-state; in other words, they are a consistent source of problems for others in Thai society.

For some Malays, the existence of the tombs of sultans and rajas of Patani evinces the history of their community as an independent kingdom. Narratives of the cruel acts of the Siamese on members of the community since the first defeat of Patani to Siam in 1786 to the present-day stirs up anti-state emotions amongst some Malays. Thus, while some Malays take up arms against the Thai-state, others resist the Thai-state's nationalist interpretation of history by disseminating oral historical accounts of a history of the glories of the historical Kingdom of Patani. These oral accounts are transmitted to other members of the contemporary, as well as across generations of, Malay population of southern Thailand.

The link between memory and group identity is a consequential one. (Anderson 1991; Barme 1993; Gillis 1994a; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Lowenthal 1994; Smith 1991; Winichakul 2004) Traditional Malay accounts of their community's past enhances their community's resolve to preserve a Malay ethnic identity that emphasizes cultural differences between them and other groups that make up the Thai nation-state. Memories of their collective suffering as a community at the hands of agents of the Thai-state become instrumental in creating unity. I have often been informed by members of the Malay community of southern Thailand that they believe that it is important

for them to maintain their ethnic identity. When asked why it is important to maintain their ethnic identity, many Malays are unable to furnish a reason except to avoid being completely assimilated into the Thai culture; although it is also important not to assume that the Malays of southern Thailand preserve their ethnic identity for the sole purpose of resisting the Thai-state's nation-building campaign. Bang Ae and I once accompanied Ayah Leh on a visit to a Malay community on Libong Island, which is located on the southern Thailand's west-coast province of Trang. Reflecting on the community that we visited, Bang Ae said,

> "It is so sad that they have lost their customs and traditions. They are very certain that they are ethnically Malays, yet they cannot speak a single word of the Malay-language. Even the older villagers who claim that they used to speak in Malay during their childhood can no longer do that. I never thought that this was possible. Now, they are no different from any other Thai-person. That's why we have to preserve our culture in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Furthermore, our culture is wealth that we have inherited from our ancestors. It will be a waste if we stop practicing it."

It is important, however, to bear in mind that the Malays of southern Thailand are not a monolithic group. Collective memories of community histories as well as events have been shown to be detached from the lived experiences of individuals involved; hence, they tend to be facile. It is thus

important to seek alternative voices of the individual members of society, and in this case the Malay community, to gain a more thorough understanding of the community being studied. Bang Mat's alternative interpretations of certain events have enabled a more varied perspective of the Malay community of southern Thailand to be furnished in this thesis. His views are proof that individuals may exercise agency in interpreting the politics that surrounds them; although the relative strong influence of group narratives cannot be ignored.

## Conclusion: Anti-State, but not Separatists

Several Malay residents of southern Thailand told me that they hope that the violence that has wrecked their socio-political environment would end soon. Many of them add that rather than fight for an independent Malay nation-state, they would rather channel their efforts towards creating a brighter future for their youth. Bang Ae, in particular, commands some respect from other members of his village community; although his family counts among the more necessitous families in Ban Keli, Bang Ae's children are excelling in their studies. His eldest child is now an undergraduate, while his second child is set to follow suit. Envious neighbors often ask Bang Ae on how he has managed to motivate his children to succeed in education. Furthermore, other villagers admire Bang Ae's economic sacrifice; they told me that Bang Ae remains poor in part because he spends most of his money to school his children. In general, some residents of Ban Keli take pride in the

positive trend in the number of their village youth who earn placements in universities.

The ambition of many Malays to achieve success in various aspects of public life in Thailand is testament to their loyal commitment to that nation-state. I was told by several Malays that a career in the civil service is a dream held by many young Malay university graduates; I know several such aspirants personally. Even the active participation of some Malays in protests that are organized by non-governmental organizations, such as those against environmental issues, ratify this commitment. This, of course, does not obliterate the fact that it is possible for someone to partake in Thailand's public life and yet harbor separatist sentiments. Thus, it is important to adopt a nuanced view of these issues and be critical of the simplistic rhetoric that the Thai-state and the Malay insurgents engage in from time to time.

The anti-state resistance of southern Thailand's Malay community, such as the erection of monumental tombs of martyrs as well as the dissemination of oral histories that challenge the official narrative of Thailand's history, do not signify Malay inclination to establish a separate Malay nation-state from Thailand. Instead, they indicate the desire of some Malays for a less discriminatory notion of "Thainess"[63]; both in rhetoric as well as practice. Thus, in the classic-fashion whereby the ethnographic subject speaks to the ethnographer using examples that the ethnographer

[63] "Thainess" is often referred to as *"khwaam pen thai*".

can relate to, Bang Ae said to me, “We are Thai citizens, but ethnically Malay. If people of various ethnicities can co-exist peacefully in Singapore, why should it be a problem in Thailand?”

# CONCLUSION:

# ON THE NEED TO COMBAT ESSENTIALISM

It was another hot afternoon in southern Thailand. Bang Ae and I sat at a coffee-shop in Ban Ketam and gulped down glasses of refrigerated soft drinks as we took a break from building a garage at Ayah Leh's house. Then, a military truck stopped outside the coffee-shop and three soldiers alighted promptly. They walked towards the roadside snack stall where one of them purchased some finger food while the other two stood guard. Then, Bang Ae said to me,

> "I sympathize with these guys; the soldiers. Even when buying food, they have to be so vigilant. I would also be afraid if I were a soldier in southern Thailand. They come from other provinces; they have no friends here; and they know nothing of this place except that there is a lot of violence and that many civil servants have been killed, including soldiers. Their uniforms are supposed to give them authority. But here, their uniforms make them targets. It makes them easily seen by the killers. I really pity them; and their family. There are rumors saying that some soldiers are even willing to pay others to come to southern Thailand in their place."

For me, Bang Ae's words were encouraging. Essentialism and prejudice are so rife in many societies, yet there are those amongst us who are sensible enough to reject them. In southern Thailand, the Thai military is often viewed by some Malays as a violent organization; it embodies the Thai-state's violence towards the Malay community. As one Malay man put it,

> "How can they send the military to build peace in southern Thailand? That's not the function of the Thai military. They are trained to kill and that's all that they can do. Just look at the way they handled that group (the militants) at Krisek Mosque on 28 April (2004) and the crowd at Tak Bai."

Ayah Leh concurs when he told me,

> "An old friend of mine called me to ask for advice. He said that in his long service in the military, this is the first time that he is tasked with peace-building. He said that he has fought the communists in *Isan*[64]; killed them. But, this (peace-building) is more difficult to carry out than that. He just did not know what to do. Sometimes I wonder; how can killing a fellow human being be easier to do than to 'make friends'?"

Once I accompanied Bang Ae to visit his friend at Ban Belut, a village that is adjacent to Ban Keli. While the three of us sat down and talked in the hall of his home, a section of soldiers on foot beat walked by his house; one

[64] *Isan* is the colloquial term referring to the Northeastern region of Thailand.

of the soldiers was carrying a general purpose machine-gun (GPMG), a relatively large rifle. Bang Ae's friend, Mat Seng, shook his head and said, "Look at those guys. They walk by several times every day. They don't talk to the villagers; they don't smile. Instead, they just look at us suspiciously. How can they establish good rapport with the villagers that way? Sometimes I feel like we are living in Iraq!"

Incidents such as the "Tragedy of 13 December 1975" and those that occurred on 28 April 2004 and 25 October 2004 do little to challenge the perceived cruelties of the Thai-state and the military amongst the Malays. The intensity of the force employed by the state through its military during these events is perceived to be excessive by many Malays. For some Malays, the use of grenades and rocket launchers apart from the usual assault rifles testifies to the Thai-military's high propensity for violence. That some of the militants who sought refuge inside Krisek Mosque on 28 April 2004 were killed at point-blank is taken by some Malays as an indication of the inhumanness of the military.

Some Malays, like Bang Ae, on the other hand, differentiate between the military as an organization and the individual soldiers that c0nstitute the military. By sympathizing with the soldiers and their families, Bang Ae treats the soldier as a fellow person; instead of viewing him simplistically as just another member of the military. Further, he puts himself in the shoes of the soldier when he added, "I would not want to trade places with the soldiers. Walking around to protect others, when you cannot even protect yourself? It

must be very stressful." Ayah Leh adds, "Usually you'll be more afraid if you are standing in public with a weapon on you. You will worry about whether someone will snatch your weapon and use it to harm you."[65] It is such a contradiction; the soldier's source of authority, such as his firearms and uniform, is also a potential source of harm for him.

I had the opportunity to talk with a Muslim army captain from Bangkok who has been posted to southern Thailand since 2004. He told me about his experience of being spot-checked at a military roadblock once while riding his motorcycle back to camp after performing prayers at a nearby mosque. At that time, he was dressed in *jubah*[66] and spotted a skullcap on his head. According to him, the soldiers who checked him were quite rude until he divulged his real identity to them. He, then, advised them to treat the local residents more appropriately; he thinks that it is important for soldiers to treat the locals with respect in order to gain their trust. He said that he told them, "Not all Malays are insurgents. So, you shouldn't treat all of them as if

[65] In Singapore, all men, with a few exceptions, are expected to enlist for national service at the age of eighteen. Thus, I could immediately relate to Ayah Leh's comment due to my national service experience. I was assigned to the Police Coast Guard. We were constantly reminded to be vigilant in guarding our personal weapons from being snatched. Many of us would feel relieved when at the end of every patrol shift when we return our firearms to the armory.

[66] The *jubah* is a long gown, similar to a cassock, which is commonly worn by Malay-Muslim men in southern Thailand when they perform prayers at the mosque. The *jubah* is originally traditional Arab clothing for men.

they are. Do not judge people by their dressing, or simply by their darker skin color[67].”

It has been argued in this thesis that there are two dominant strands of discourse on the relations between the Malays of southern Thailand and the Thai nation-state. The dominant Malay discourse about the issue asserts that the Thai-state, especially through its military, is violent and cruel towards the Malays of southern Thailand. On the other hand, the dominant discourse of the Thai-state contends that the Malays of southern Thailand are troublemakers who consistently challenge the sovereignty of the Thai nation-state through armed separatist movements. These two influential discourses, which are parochial and antithetical to each other, are a major obstacle to the establishment of peace in southern Thailand.

Individuals like Bang Ae, the army captain, as well as Bang Mat who was mentioned in the earlier chapters, are proofs that individual members of communities exercise agency in rationalizing these two discursive frameworks. It is important to encourage others in Thai society, in specific, and the world, in general, to adopt such critical positions. If essentialism remains pandemic in society, it is likely that many people will be alienated. For example, should my encounter with the taxi driver in Phuket, which was discussed in chapter three, occur to the members of the Malay community of

[67] Some Thais view the Malays as having darker skin, or *tua dam*, compared to them. Personally, I have been treated both with much politeness by some soldiers, and rudely by others; both before and after they have learnt of my identity as a Singaporean.

Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, it is imaginable that they would feel even more alienated from the rest of Thai society.

The effect of such essentialism is greater when it involves the actions of influential institutions such as the state. The Thai-state provides weapons and firearms training to Thai-Buddhist villages in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, as a response to the on-going violence, which is consistently blamed on the "Muslims"[68]. In doing so, the state sends a message to Thai-Buddhists in southern Thailand that they have to be wary of the Muslims around them; as the identity of individual insurgents are not known. Some Malay-Muslims, on the other hand, feel that the Thai-state has acted unfairly. Bang Ae said to me, "Many Malays are disappointed in the government for providing firearms and training to the Buddhists. When we look carefully at the trend of the killings, we Malays are just as vulnerable as the Buddhists." Hence, the Thai-state's decision to provide arms and training to Thai-Buddhists in southern Thailand has fuelled feelings of hatred and distrust between the two ethno-religious communities. Some Malay men told me that many of their Thai-Buddhists friends have distanced themselves since the start of the on-going violence. At present, the military even acknowledges the possibility that Thai-Buddhist vigilante groups, some founded by Thai security officers and even with the support of the queen, may be involved in

[68] In Thailand's mass media, the Malays are primarily referred to as "Muslims" not Malays or Malay-Muslims.

several extra-judicial killings of Muslims in southern Thailand. (C. Pinyorat 2007a)

The constant reference to the Malays of southern Thailand as "Muslims" by the Thai-state and the mass media has created a widespread perception that the violence in southern Thailand is, in fact, a religious conflict. In the context of current geo-political trends, with much focus on Muslim terrorism in other parts of the world, the "Muslim" label lends the Malay-Muslims of southern Thailand susceptible to be misunderstood as another community of Muslim terrorists. This trend can be observed on the Internet where articles about "Muslim militants" published in Thailand's English-language newspapers are uploaded onto online blogs. (Johnson 2007) Such information, in turn, buttresses the misconceptions that many people have about Muslims the world over. Someone in Bangkok once said to me, "Why do you choose to do your work in the South? The Muslims will kill you. They will cut off your head."

Thus, the consequences of essentialism are extensive; especially in an increasingly globalized world where information about one society is received by others across the world in a matter of seconds. This thesis highlights the importance of agency in human thought and action. In the case of the violence in southern Thailand, it is important for the Thai-state as well as the Thai society to avoid believing and propagating essentialist dominant views of the Malays as disloyal troublemakers. The reverse is also pertinent; the Malays of southern Thailand should not adopt a view of the Thai-state that is

based solely on the episodes of violence in the history of relations between them.

In a wider context, the violence involving the Malay-Muslims of southern Thailand must not be simplistically taken as another religious conflict and that the insurgents are merely another group of Islamic terrorists. By assuming that the violence in southern Thailand as religious conflict, the Thai-state as well as writers, including academics and journalists, have contributed to the creation of an international image of the Malay insurgents as Islamic terrorists. This, in turn, incites more suspicion for the world's Muslims population.

Given the immeasurable adverse impacts of essentialism, it is imperative for scholars to recognize the existence of individual agency when studying social issues. Presenting dominant discourses, even if they are antithetical, is not enough if we are to contribute anything to the betterment of the human condition.

> "Normally others don't see us; the small people. Even when they do, they only see our heads. They don't see our faces. Look at us carefully! Look at our faces! We are all different!" – Bang Ae

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